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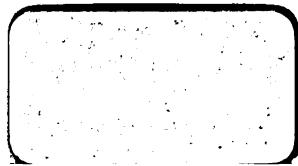
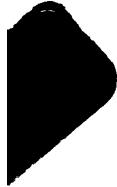
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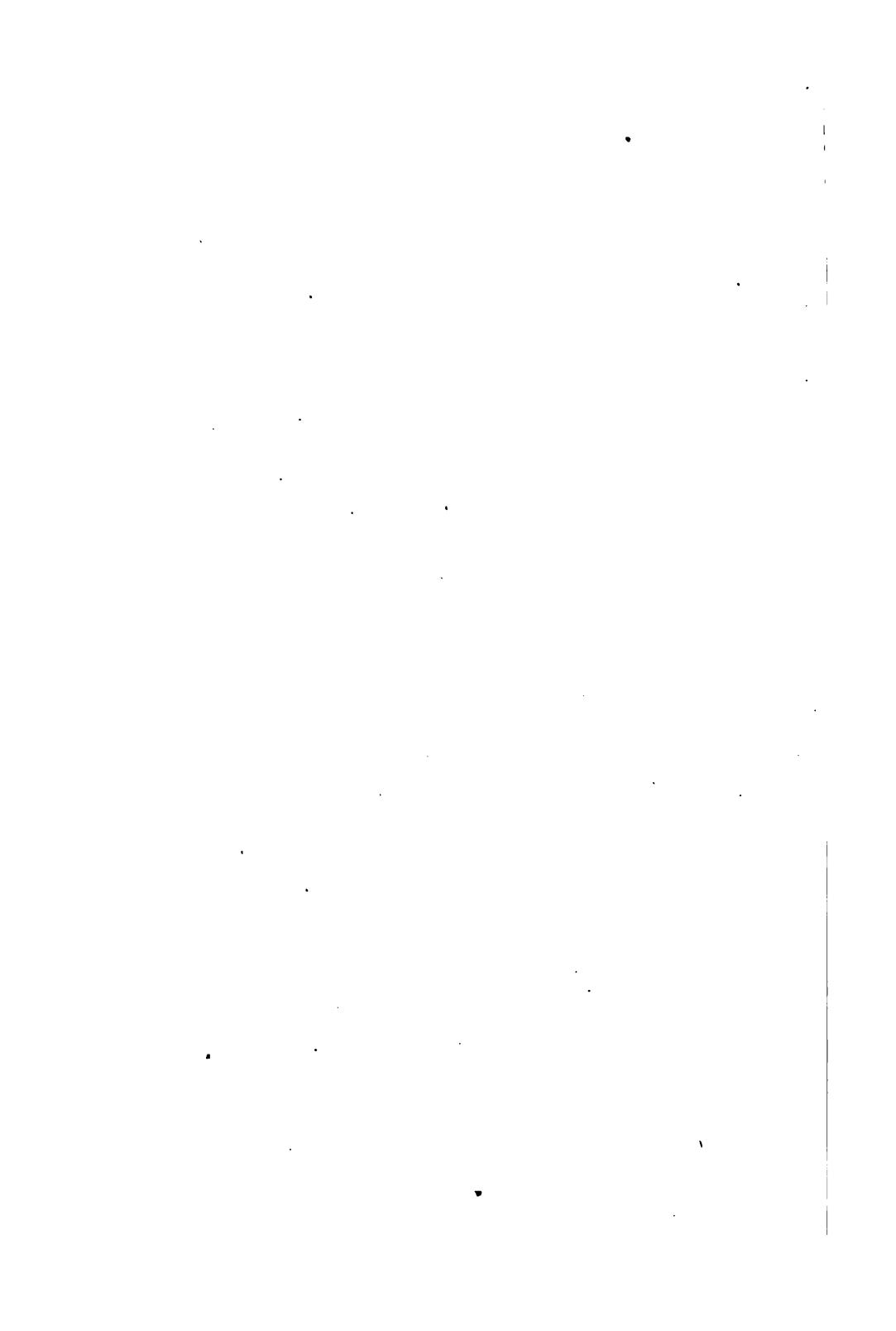




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ANDREW RAMSAY OF ERROL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“JOHN ARNOLD,” “MATHEW PAXTON,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

IT was some time before people calmed down into their ordinary use and wont again. Months passed away before they ceased to speak about the dreadful crimes, and the no less fearful people by whom they had been perpetrated. But gradually other stirring events drove the Burke and Hare atrocities out of mind. Perhaps the futile attempt made to punish the latter villain, the way he was treated in the south of Scotland after he had been liberated, and the mystery which ever afterwards hung over his fate, and that of the two women, helped to keep them before the public

mind longer than would otherwise have been the case. Certainly, there never were four people, in themselves so insignificant, who made more noise in the world than those wretches did. A hundred naturalists may live and die, and hardly leave a trace behind them, save, mayhap, in the Latinized name to some weed or stone; but Burke gave a verb to the language, and the mere mention of his name for years afterwards in Scotland had a power of terrifying the people far and near, such as no other name, in modern times at least, has ever had. There is little wonder, therefore, that the whole of this case made a deep and lasting impression on my mind, though a haze has fallen upon the separate items of it. I remember the appearance of Mary Leslie that Saturday, with the snow flakes glistening on her dark hair as

vividly as possible; but over the trial of Burke, and its result, a dimness has fallen, though the impression produced by the whole is as deep as ever.

I have said that I was neither so contented nor so happy as I should have been, after Menie became a visitor at Meadowside. Why was it so? It is quite easy to ask, but not so easy to answer, as I found when I tried. It was long before I could tell. It was very difficult for me to find a reason for my state of mind, but that did not alter the state of the case. It is true the evenings I spent there were still very happy ones—the old Bible, and various other books, ancient and modern, were still as attractive, and the old windowed recess as cozy, only somehow I did not enjoy them as I had done before. Mary Leslie was just as kind and friendly,

and the addition of Menie to the guests in the drawing-room ought to have caused any change of feeling rather than the one that came upon me, one would fancy. But it did cause a change, and I found out that the bringing of Menie into that enchanted ground had broken the charm in part, and that it abridged the delightful hours we used to spend behind the old books ; for she either joined us, or enticed Mary away with her into the general company, so that these pleasant times came very nearly to an end, and I grew proportionately moody and discontented.

I was getting along truly. Now-a-days, if I saw any lad in the same predicament, I fancy I should be greatly inclined to laugh at him, and think it would be more for his good to be kept at work, than allowed to go out week

after week to such a house to be made much of by womenkind.

I am not so very sure, though, that that is by any means the best species of training. I fancy, being brought up without much companionship with women is the worst kind of upbringing possible. In a business like ours, which was chiefly with the feminines, there is even a greater necessity for this safeguard than in almost any other trade or profession. We see plenty of the young, the old, and the middle-aged, but if we never intimately associate with some of them at home or elsewhere, we run a greater risk, I conceive, than others.

We shop-lads, seeing our masters and superiors regarding nearly all who came into the shop as victims, whom it is almost a duty to cheat or deceive, or any way

to flatter and tempt in matters of business, are not likely to have a very high opinion of the sex in higher and holier things. What causes the flippancy, pertness, and downright impertinence of this class of shopmen but just this, that they are meeting with women every day, and all day long are being trained, and having their wits directed to acquire the art of cajolery at first, and to keep them in constant exercise afterwards, to induce them to purchase. It is a mere natural sequence that, having cheated them often into believing appearance was truth in the goods they sold, they should cheat them also in much more serious matters; and so become, to all of their sex with whom they dared take liberties, insufferably conceited and impertinent.

I speak of the class of which I was

once a member ; the fluency—gift of the gab—which they acquire, the sophistry they have spent years in learning, sticks to them, and they are very apt to become the most disagreeable people one can meet, at least till their days of cubhood have passed away, and worldly wisdom teaches them somewhat of decorum, if not of modesty.

Now I fancy that, knowing and meeting frequently with respectable well-educated women, is to young men of the very highest importance. I don't know of any other thing that is of so much, and it is that which alone can check, counteract, and prevent that vulgarity of feeling and tone which prevails so often among my own class.

There was hardly a possibility of obtaining such acquaintances among us

shopmen and lads. The great thing desired by all the shopkeepers of Edinburgh then, when they wanted an apprentice, was to get a lad from the country, who should see his friends as seldom as possible, who, at the same time, should be kept restricted in his master's house to the companionship of boys like himself, and shopmen who had passed through the same ordeal, and who should associate with the domestic servants, who, in such houses, were by no means the best company he could have. And then in the shop everything was conducted on the high-pressure system, and youths, a month or two ago so fresh and unsophisticated, soon became adepts at fawning upon and flattering the customers, and, imitating their elders, equally adepts in criticizing and discussing in by no means the most delicate way

the women who came about the place ; and hence their early initiation into and proficiency in the kind of slang which passes for wit, and pleases the giggling girls who are the customers of the shop.

I fully believe my going so much to Meadowside—though it might be hurtful in other respects—saved me at that time from much of this vulgarity and impudent would-be smartness. And the Meadowside people did make a great deal of me, from old Tibbie the housekeeper, whose huge frilled and bordered mutch had caused such awe to fall upon me at first, up to Miss Grahame herself. I was a favourite with them all ; and then Menie, at first welcomed from the idea of giving me pleasure, soon became a weekly guest, as well established there as myself, and was much liked for her own sake—her womanly ways

and habits. Menie was ever the very soul of orderliness and propriety, and this above everything else pleased the good ladies. Yet even Menie was only reckoned and spoken of for a long time as Andrew's sister, or Andrew Ramsay's sister. I soon found that in many respects Menie was proposed as a pattern for Mary Leslie; and as the girls really liked each other, it was quite natural that Mary Leslie should be much more occupied with Menie than with me. It was all very well, while there was no other young person about the house, that we should be a great deal together, but quite as natural, and I suppose now a great deal more proper, that Mary should be drawn away from my society when a more suitable companion was found. So it was any way, and I had to be content, though I felt the change very much.

I believe, though I was only a boy, that I was very much in love then. I feel quite sure that—though I never reasoned on the subject then, and would have laughed the idea to scorn—Mary then laid that fast hold of my heart which she has ever held. I believe her liking for me was as genuine as my own for her, and also that it grew and strengthened with the passing time, though for years there was little demonstration of it.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW years passed away in this fashion, and the term of my apprenticeship with Mr. John Chapman was drawing nigh to an end. It had not been during that period all fair weather with me either, nor had the influence of the ladies at Meadow-side produced in me all the effect it should have done. Long before this time, Mary Leslie had gone out into the world as a governess, and my sister Menie was in business on her own account in the honest town of Errol; yet my Sundays for a long while after they were both away were re-

gularly spent in the old drawing-room, and even when I began to be remiss, and my visits became more irregular, I was always kindly welcomed when I did go, though latterly I fancied an extra shade of thought and care seemed to gather on the brow of Miss Grahame when she looked at or spoke to me, and Miss Burns would sit and sigh and look with pity upon me many times when my spirits were high.

And there was good reason for it ; there was a cause which was operating more and more upon me, from day to day, which, with all my care, and notwithstanding all the precautions which I adopted, I could not hide from eyes so kindly and so keen as theirs. I had fallen into bad habits ; I had got among evil people, and the crying vice of the time and of the country had laid hold upon me. I have

already said that, during my boyhood, I had been so horrified, distressed, and disgusted by what I had seen of drunkenness, and the misery it had caused before my own eyes, that I had refused, even at Meadowside, to taste the wine which they had offered me, and this abstinence on my part continued till I had been some years in Edinburgh. When, however, I was about eighteen, and thought myself a man, and was most anxious that other people should think so too, one Sunday, at Meadowside, after the girls, Mary Leslie and Menie had gone away, I broke through my resolutions, and cast aside my previous habits.

Sir William Soulis was there as usual, and was getting his glass of toddy before going away, as was the constant custom, when, after a long interval, Miss Grahame

herself offered me a glass of wine. I do not know what prompted her to do so at that time, seeing that, for years now, she had not done it; but I know this, that it was no love, nor even liking for it, but merely a desire to do what was considered, manly, which induced me to take the wine that night. The old baronet, who had approved of my abstinence before, nodded approval also of my act now, and said something about taking everything in moderation ; and I daresay—nay, I am quite sure, that the ladies themselves thought it was very laudable in me to depart from such stupid stiff-neckedness in this particular respect as had so long characterised me. Anyway, from that time I never refused to do as their other guests did.

Of course it is nonsense to say, as some

people are always very ready, to say that it was that first glass which led me astray, or even awakened in me a desire for more. I recollect perfectly that I did not think the wine either very disagreeable or very pleasant. I did not think it a hard matter either to take it or to leave it alone. Other young men were not afraid of it ; it was the practice in good society, and everywhere, indeed ; moreover, it was a manly habit, and there was an end of it. But then the barrier was broken down, and after that I never hesitated or refused when I was asked to partake. I fell gradually into the way of all around me, both in the shop and in the world.

It is true, at the same time, that I had too little money, too few acquaintances, to be greatly exposed, and habitual

drinking, properly so called, was quite unknown in the society I met with ; but I was busy forming the vile habit for all that.

On the Sunday afternoons, it at last became very common for myself and some of my companions to go out to the suburbs, to Leith or Newhaven, and there club together our pence for whiskey. Such a mode of acting was so very common, so usual with young men, that it was considered by many people, respectable enough in their way, too, quite a matter of course after a long walk.

Then any relatives I had in Edinburgh were quite people of this Sunday-afternoon-walk sort, and latterly I got into the way of being a great deal with them. A walk after the afternoon service—for they were strict church-goers—either before or

after tea, was their usual practice, when the weather suited, and they always hailed me as a welcome companion ; and with them some refreshment when out, and a good tumbler of toddy when we returned, were indispensable.

Thus, the barrier once broken down, the flood set in by little and little, gradually becoming stronger, until I acquired a decided liking for the stimulant ; and though, up to the end of my apprenticeship, I had never been tipsy, never, indeed, what could be called excited, nor ever had it in my power to become so, save at the expense of another, which my pride would not suffer me to stoop to, yet I had lost, in a great measure, the freshness of my youth ; and there were thoughts and desires in my heart which I shudder now to think of, but which then my changed modes of speech must have made apparent.

At home this change of habit was not censured—not at all; I believe it was regarded as the natural consequence of my advance in years. My mother, though she had suffered so much herself, and had seen among her friends so much suffering and misery proceeding from drunkenness, did not desire her son to be different from his fellows, neither did she dream that there was the least reason to fear, because I conformed to the way of the world, that I should become a slave to drink. I don't believe there was one of them that was not pleased, with the exception of Menie. I fancy Menie knew me and my temperament better than even my mother did. I am quite sure she judged more correctly when she counselled me to return to my old system again. And had it not been that Menie's coun-

sel, at that time above all others, took rather too much of the form of scolding than I relished, it might have been of more avail; but I was then too proud, too independent and self-confident, to be guided by scolding, though I believe I would have been by advice.

I was drawing rather too near the dangerous abyss—I was fast getting into a bad state. I can see that now, though I did not then; and as my term of apprenticeship drew to an end, so did my appetite for stimulants increase. Yet I was only nineteen. I had never been so bad as many of my neighbours of similar years, but the desire had been awakened. The tide had begun to flow, and whither it would carry me, I could not guess. I never once thought at that time that quite as likely as not it might cast me

a waif and wreck high upon the shore among decaying seaweed, there to rot and perish, or dash me against some rock where my bark should founder irretrievably. I fancied that I could govern the advancing waves, but, like Canute, found, to my serious detriment and loss, that the tide was too strong for me to resist its impetus, however it might be with others. Alas ! alas ! that I should have to say so, but so I found it to be, after many a long and hard trial.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN my apprenticeship was finished, I remained for some time longer with Mr. Chapman as a journeyman, for we were never called assistants in those days. During all this time I was continually sinking in my own esteem, and always more or less afraid to meet my good, kind friends at Meadowside.

I had met Mary Leslie once or twice during the last year, and once when I would have so gladly—oh! how gladly! —avoided seeing her. I did not know where to look after I had caught one glimpse of her beautiful face. It was on the day of the Jubilee for the passing

of the Reform Bill, when all Edinburgh was daft with joy, when there was a great procession, and everybody was wild, either with the desire to see it, or to form a unit in it. We shopmen had holiday, and were no less foolish than our neighbours, which we speedily made known by the absurdity of our conduct.

I was on the Bridge with some of my comrades when I saw Menie and Mary coming right towards us; if I could, I would have concealed myself, but they had seen me first. I never felt more confused in all my life, I believe, than I did when I met these two girls. The glance Mary cast upon me was so sad, so sorrowful, as if she had heard of my backsliding, that I could hardly take the hand which she held out to me, or speak to her.

There is always a great deal of braggadocio in lads such as I was then, and I

fancy I did not fall much short of my fellows in that quality ; but I could not stand that look at first, and it was only when Menie, with perhaps a little asperity in her tone, said that she wondered to see me standing there in such a state, that I partially recovered myself, and attempted with a troubled heart to laugh it off. But all my efforts would not do ; the grieved look remained, and these two girls took possession of me for the remainder of the day—doubtless, though they said nothing of it to me, to keep me from going further astray.

And wherefore ? What had I done, or what was I doing ? Nothing but what was natural, and almost praiseworthy, according to the circumstances and notions of the time, which associated enjoyment with indulgence in drink of some kind, and regard-

ed a rare holiday, such as this, as one on which it became all to rejoice, to drink bumper toasts to the honour of those popular leaders who had won the new privileges for the people. We had been doing that in a small way, and I was a little excited, no more; but what to the others was, or might be, quite harmless, to me was the reverse, and when the procession passed, with the grand exciting music and waving banners, and my shopmates became enthusiastic, I became wildly extravagant, and drew to myself the notice of the passers-by, and of the people standing around. People do not think of the difference of temperament, but judge by the outward appearance, and thus what was harmless and innocent excitement in the other lads was drunkenness in me; but on that day the people of Edinburgh were prepared to think

leniently of any such transgression as this.

It is not my purpose to say anything further of the proceedings of that great day of rejoicing, except that all Edinburgh and the country round, far and near, were on the streets to see the procession, and that my own family and the neighbours had come in *en masse* for this special purpose. As may well be supposed, I did not much wish to see my mother in my then excited state, and if I had been left to myself I should have hesitated to do so, but the girls had fast hold of me, and what could I do but yield to them? So, amid the jibes and jeers of my reckless comrades, I was carried off to my mother. I don't think I ever was more thoroughly discomfited in all my life than I was on that day, for there beside me was not only Mary Leslie's sad face, but I had also to meet my mother's grave, serious look. I

was thankful she had not seen my wild extravagance as the procession passed, yet she noticed in a moment that I was not as I should have been, and though she said nothing then, I could tell as well as possible—notwithstanding my excitement—that she was grieved to the very heart. I became remorseful there and then, and resolved, as foolish lads so often do, without thinking of anything but their own resolution and will, that I would never grieve her in the same way again—that I would rather go away to some far distant place, and then all she should know of me would be from the letters I should send.

This resolution once formed, this purpose evoked, a change came over me as I determined to carry it into effect. How I should or could do so, was a question which, surrounded by those entreating eyes, I could not answer; but I resolved to solve

the problem—to get away, if that were possible, at the earliest available opportunity. I never felt so painfully embarrassed as I did that afternoon, and never before left the presence of my mother, and kindred, and friends with such pleasure, or, at least, such a sense of relief, as I did that day. The girls would have me go with them to Meadowside, where they were to stay all night; but I felt too much ashamed of myself, sobered and quiet as I had become, to go there with them. So I left them almost at the gate of Miss Grahame's garden, and hurried away to our poor chill room in the area floor of Mr. Chapman's house, and flung myself on my bed in an agony of shame, and tears, and wounded pride. But what was the use of weeping, and of the repentant fit which then came over me, when, in an hour or

two afterwards, I allowed myself to be seduced once more, and, before the night ended, was in a worse state than before, and felt, at least for the time, that I could not help myself, even if I tried.

I have often read of people who, having got tipsy overnight, were yet so well and hearty in the morning that they could set about their usual business, civil or military, with as great zest and heartiness as usual; and I have wondered how such things could be, for of a certainty I never could myself, nor have those I have associated with been able to do so. I had been tipsy the previous night, greatly excited both with the drink and the spectacle, and the promise to the people, which had occasioned it, and to my cost I found on the following morning that I was unable to rise as fresh as usual, and when I got down to the shop with

racking headache, burning thirst, and haggard look, I found Mr. Chapman there before me. Very properly, as I well know now, he rebuked me for being so late; he had been scolding all the rest as well, for they were all mostly in the same condition; but I was the laggard, and came in for the heaviest reprobation, as I well deserved. But I was just in that mood—displeased with myself and miserable—when a reproof from anybody would set me on fire, fairly drive me wild indeed, and this from Mr. Chapman had quite that effect. So I flung down impatiently the goods I had in my hands for the decoration of the windows, and declared that I would not be spoken to in such a way, but that I would leave his shop that instant, which I did—a very silly, foolish act, but yet amazingly like what a hot-blooded young man would do.

I was thus adrift by my own act, utterly

adrift on the world's sea, not a little to my own satisfaction at first, I confess, for I longed to get out of Edinburgh. The great point for consideration, then, was, where I should go to; and that, after an hour or two's thinking, I could only solve by an indefinite resolution to go to England. True, I could go home, and be sure of the tenderest sympathy there at all times. But that, after yesterday's folly, was the very last thing I cared to do. Having a few pounds of wages to receive, as much, I thought, as would pay my passage and keep for a few weeks, I resolved to try England; and in order to set about it at once, I thought I should go to Meadowside, to bid my kind friends farewell. So with the best aspect of sobriety I could assume, and with by no means the best feelings in my heart to my old master, I set out to pay my farewell visit to Meadowside.

CHAPTER IV.

AT Meadowside I found the ladies quite anxious about me, for Menie had been less circumspect than usual, and if she had not plainly told them the state I had been in, they gathered as much from what she had said. Miss Grahame was prepared to make great allowance for me, on account of the universal excitement of the day, though she was very much grieved that I should have so far succumbed to its influence. Miss Burns was more distressed, and looked more sadly than I had ever seen her do before. And I, notwithstanding all my efforts to

be bold, was thoroughly ashamed. I do not think during all my life—and I have often enough had good reason to be ashamed of my conduct—that I ever felt more so than I did that day. In a few excited sentences, I told them what had happened, and what I thought of doing.

“Well, Andrew,” said Miss Grahame, “perhaps leaving Edinburgh just now *is* the very best thing you could do; but where have you thought of going to?”

“I don’t know—anywhere, anywhere, to get away. I fancy there will not be much difficulty in getting a place in some of the towns in England.”

“Is it so very easy to get a situation here?” Miss Burns asked. “Do you not think that it may be just as hard to find one in England as it would be here, Andrew? I rather think it would.”

"But I shouldn't be particular about the business; I would take any sort of place I could get. I don't care what I do, if I could only get something. My own business, or any kind of work, I'll be very well content with, if I only can get a living."

"Still I think it is very rash and very hazardous to go away so far, especially on a mere peradventure," Miss Burns urged. "Many a lad has made shipwreck of himself in this way, Andrew; I don't like it at all, I must say."

"Yes," I answered; "and many of the great English merchants have gone away from their homes as poor as I am. I may have as good luck as they, may I not, Miss Burns?"

"Oh! yes, of course you may; but I fancy, Andrew, that these merchants you

speak of did not leave their native country in the same way, or from the same reason, as you are doing. Do you think they did, Andrew?"

I was silent; I could not say a word in defence of myself at that moment, though I felt more hurt and vexed than I cared to confess. Yet Miss Burns had only alluded in the most general and gentlest terms to my yesterday's fault and to-day's folly. The sting was not in the lady's words, but in my own heart—the sense of ill-desert which I felt so keenly in myself. Miss Grahame came to the rescue, however.

"Well, Andrew, if you must go," she said—"and I think, for my own part, that it is the very best thing you can do—we must try' to further you as much as we can. I suppose all places are much the

same to you—you'll think one town quite as good as another, won't you, Steenie?"

I felt quite assured again when Miss Grahame called me by the old familiar name. Andrew, with these good ladies, was too formal, and cast a sort of chill upon me.

"Yes, Miss Grahame," I replied, as she paused, and seemed to expect an answer. "All places are much alike to me."

"Then," she continued, "we have some acquaintances in Liverpool—I daresay they have not forgotten us altogether. I shall give you letters to them, and I have no doubt but that they will do all they can for you. But you'll have to take great care of yourself, Steenie—very great care, and never speak of luck again. It is not luck which advances a man in

the world. Humanly speaking, it is good conduct and careful perseverance on his part alone which does it. With the blessing of God on these he may succeed, but he should depend on nothing else."

"I know that—I never meant anything else," I answered, confusedly; "but it's the common mode of speaking, Miss Grahame—I meant nothing more."

"Very well, Steenie. Now you are going to see your friends, I suppose, to-day. I shall get the letters ready for you as quickly as possible. When do you wish to go away?"

I dared not say to them that I did not wish to go home. In my rash, headstrong folly I had thought of flying off at once, without seeing any one. I was a great coward in every way, and feared them all, especially my mother and Menie.

What excuses could I make to them?—what would they say to me, and how should I ever get their consent to go so far away? So I said to Miss Grahame that I was ready to start at once, whenever she pleased to give me the letters.

I felt myself compelled to go home that afternoon, though I would have given anything to have been able to start off at once for the unknown town which had been placed before me, as it were, by Miss Grahame. After leaving Meadowside, I set out, pretty late in the day it was, for I had to make arrangements about my trunk, to get the small modicum of wages due to me, and various other little things before I could go. There was still about me a great deal of the fumes of yesterday's dissipation and

excitement; and not about me alone, but all over the town. I came ever and anon on groups of people who had been unable to do any work that day because of the indulgence of the day before. The majority did not seem any the better for their idleness. They had apparently resolved that this night should be spent as the former one had been, though next day should find them worse than they now were. Especially as I reached the outskirts of the city did I see such groups. At an earlier period of the day troops of young men had gone out of town with the vague idea that thus they were in the way of becoming steadier than they could be if exposed to the temptations of the town. Vain hope to the greater part, as these suburbs swarmed with public-houses, and all manner of temptations. I felt somewhat tried myself as I passed

by house after house where boisterous parties were carousing ; and even though I was going home, and had the grieved look of my mother and Menie constantly before my mind, I could not resist the temptation at last.

I met with an acquaintance from Errol at a village about four miles from Edinburgh, who insisted on treating me, as we had not seen each other for a long time, and I yielded. He had been drinking, but was not tipsy. I could see well enough that he was none the better for what he had taken, and had I been wise I would have shunned him as if he had been plague-stricken. But I gave way ; I fancied I should be the better for some stimulant, and that it would cause me to go on more cheerily and vigorously, and so I accepted his invitation.

The place was a large roadside public-house—an inn, in fact, which, in those days, when there were no railways, did a large trade, and was of no small consequence. This house, big as it was, was too small for the guests that night. It was full of people within, and there were benches and tables without for those who cared not who saw them so engaged. We were not of that number, but we contented ourselves with a corner in the crowded kitchen, in which we found a number of my old schoolfellows enjoying themselves. They had been at the grand spectacle of the day before, and were only thus far on their way home now. Of course such a company only made the place the more perilous for me, but I did not perceive my danger. Indeed, if I had, I question much if I would have

cared to flee from it. Certainly, I should have been ashamed to acknowledge this to these lads, that I could not do as they did, without hazard to myself. But I was soon as well content to be among them as I was to have companions on my farther journey, and so to escape from those bitter thoughts which would intrude while I was alone, whether I would or not, and which sent such a stound to my heart. In a little while I was in a fair way of forgetting them all, and forgetting myself into the bargain. It was considered kindness then—perhaps amqng the same kind of people it may be thought so still—to press and urge one to drink; so these young men did then to me, and as they were scattered about in various parties I was in a manner compelled to drink with all. My conscience was therefore soon

silenced, and there came over me forgetfulness of the past, and a kind of indifference as to the future. In truth, I did not need much pressing, and very soon—owing, I suppose, to my nervous excitable temperament—I was as wild as the wildest of them all, though they had been at this mad work most of the day. We stayed in that house for a longer time than I care to think of now, and when we did leave we were a noisy rather than a riotous party, but quite ready for anything like practical joking or horse-play.

Some of the wild young nobility—chiefly the Marquis of Waterford and his set—were just then earning for themselves a notoriety or fame which made certain species of tomfoolery fashionable. The newspapers were ever and anon filled with accounts of deeds they had done—deeds

which, if poor men had done them, would certainly have been reckoned felonies, and have been punished accordingly; but in those high-born scapegraces they were accounted as evidences of high spirit, if not of manliness. Signboards were painted over, or carried away altogether, or transferred to other houses; knockers were wrenched from doors, water-butts overthrown, lamps smashed, police and watchmen badgered, and often seriously ill-used. Various exploits of quite as creditable a kind had become the common talk of young men throughout the towns, and were reckoned the kind of pranks which were worthy of imitation; and doubtless many decent lads got themselves into scrapes not very creditable to them, from the desire of following such distinguished leaders.

My companions, as well as myself, were

that night just in the very fittest possible trim for any mischief or devilry of that sort ; and so it happened that we soon passed from speaking with admiration of the young Marquis and his deeds, to discussing how best we could imitate them. We came to the conclusion, as we drew near Errol, to show that we—all Radicals as we were in politics—were somewhat aristocratic in our tastes ; and therefore sundry attempts were made on the knockers and bell-pulls of the suburban houses—sometimes with success, though more frequently the operators were scared away ; and at last several of the party were caught in the fact, but being well known, were permitted to go away, with the pleasant intimation that they should hear more of it in the morning, which had the effect of sobering that squad of us pretty considerably. Of one of these parties

I was a member—for we had divided into little bodies, to be able to do the more mischief, I suppose, and the object of our attack was a large water cask, standing on the top of an outside stair. We found it a much more difficult job to move it than we had calculated upon, and we had just got it canted on edge, when the door opened, and a bright light was thrown on our faces and persons before we could get out of the way. We faintly tried to congratulate ourselves that we had not been recognised, as we ran off as fast as possible, till we got, after some doubles and turnings, into a narrow back street, and into a public-house there, partly to avoid pursuit, partly, it must be confessed, to indulge further in that element which had already obfuscated our brains, and led us into what promised to be a very pretty scrape.

At that time it was well-nigh impossible for a party of young men, such as we were, in Scotland, even on the most ordinary occasions, to separate without a parting glass; and we were to separate there—I to go home the remaining three miles as I best could, and the others to slink as quietly as they might to their homes in the town. We had no further desire to be seen on the street in a body as before—we had got too great a fright for that. But I was not fated to reach home that night. I had not arrived at the eastern entrance of the town, walking rather unsteadily, I doubt not, and none the less so because the idea of my mother had come back upon me now with redoubled force, when I felt a touch on the shoulder, and turning round, confronted, not Menie, as I had feared

it might be, but the officer of the town, and another person whom I did not know.

"Is this yin o' them?" the officer asked the man. "Can ye say this is yin o' them, Mr. Fleming?"

"Ay, and swear it, too. Why, this fellow was the first and foremost of them a', and the only one I didn't know."

"Weel, my lad, this is a bonnie like thing ye've been doin'," the officer said to me; "a pretty plisky ye've gotten yersel' into, I can tell you. Ye'll hae to come wi' me, my man, an' I'll gie ye free quarters for the nicht. Ye'll see what the Provost an' Bailies 'll say to ye the morn."

I was quite dumbfounded; what with the suddenness of the arrest, the horror of being hurried off to jail, and the state I was in, I could not say a word, and

therefore went away with them, in a perfect paroxysm of misery.

It was a fine August night, but growing late, and there was not many people on the street, for which I was very thankful. Here and there a small shop was open, and sometimes we saw groups of people standing at their doors, but they took little notice of us as we passed; the gloom of the evening so far favouring me, that I thought we had succeeded in entering the low archway, and that the strong heavy door had closed upon me without my having been recognised. Then I was subjected to a process which I fancy is absolutely necessary, but of which, even at this distance of time, the bare remembrance causes my cheek to flush with shame. I was strictly searched—as if I had been a thief—purse, knife and

keys being all taken possession of, and certain letters and papers read before my face ; and then I was led into another room, along one end of which was a sloping platform of wood, such as I had often seen in the guard-room of the Castle. On the edge of this bed, if it deserves the name, were seated three or four of my late comrades in folly, who, happening to be poorer or less known than the others, had been apprehended at once, as they left the public-house ; and here we were in for the night.

They were all in much the same state as I was myself—greatly excited, though far less downcast in spirit than I. It was only a spree, and being apprehended and put in prison for a folly committed in that time of madness, was not at all to be regarded as dishonourable, as they

thought and said. The effect of this conversation upon me was to make me more cheerful too. We soon became very noisy, if not very merry—and then, when we had exhausted ourselves, and when the effect of the drink had reached a certain point, we gradually, one by one, dropped off into sleep on our hard bed.

The awakening in the morning was the most trying time for us all, for we then presented to each other such flushed, wild-looking faces, and disreputable figures, as made us ashamed of ourselves; and there was not one of us that did not feel such nausea and burning thirst that we could scarcely speak. Then, as the day wore on, came our public appearance before the Provost, to which none of us looked forward with cheerfulness, or even indifference, however bold we had been last night.

The Provost of Errol was a baronet of ancient family and good estate, who had condescendingly accepted the office to oblige the townsmen, but really for the sake of the political influence which the office conferred, his residence being also within the bounds of the town. Very seldom did Sir John take any part in the town's judicial business, but on this occasion he was induced to take his seat as chief magistrate, from the number of lads implicated, and the families to which some of them belonged being the most influential in the borough.

The fame of our exploits had been bruited all over the gossiping little town long before the magistrates' hour for meeting. So we had an audience waiting for us upstairs, which made us quite as much a public spectacle as the most

notoriety-loving person could desire. All of our last night's party were present but two, who had been sent out of the way as soon as their friends had heard what they had been about. It was not a pleasant predicament to be in, and none of us liked standing at that bar; as for me, I should have been glad to hide myself anywhere. Yet there was something in the fact of companionship which made our position more bearable, and there was such a number of us that we encouraged one another unconsciously. Then we knew, though others did not, that there had really been hardly any mischief done; the complainants were more frightened than hurt, and we did not augur anything very serious from the mirthful faces of the people in the court. Of course we poor wretches, who had

been locked up all night, felt more, as well as looked much more haggard than our comrades who had slept at home, and had been able to clean and dress themselves before coming there; still, we were all placed at the bar alike, and we supposed the same punishment would be meted out to all.

Our accusers were examined fully, the evidence was carefully gone over, our defences were heard, and then the court passed sentence upon us. We were to be bound over to keep the peace for six months, and to pay the expenses, which were not very large. I know I never felt so much relieved at anything all my life as I did when this sentence was intimated to us. It was the fact that various of the young men were sons of people of some condition in the burgh that we had to

thank for this leniency. An attempt was even made to get some of the chief of these wild scapegraces out of the mire altogether; which perhaps would have been successful, but for the opposition of one of them, a fine, frank young fellow, who declared openly that if any were guilty, he was as much so. So that object was defeated, to the annoyance, as I could see, of others, who, hail-fellows over the toddy, did not care to be so in the court. Had all been of the same worldly station as we miserable wretches who had been locked up all night, the chances are that we should have been imprisoned or heavily fined, but we had to be served all alike, and so we were set free on our bonds.

I must say that the majority of the people, both in the court and in the street,

seemed to think that we were more to be admired than pitied ; and when we came out of the court-house door, they set up a cheer which rang from end to end of the main street, and the people kept up cheering and laughing till we all got housed in the chief inn of the borough, where we laughed and joked with each other, and soon forgot all the cautions and warnings with which Sir John had thought fit to favour us. It did not, moreover, seem unlikely that before night came again we should be just as fit as ever for another outbreak. However, I was heartily sick of it, and very eagerly went away when the excuse offered, that some one wished to see me.

CHAPTER V.

It was my sister Menie, who, having heard by chance that I was one of the foolish lads who had been before the magistrates that morning, had traced me to the inn, and now had sent for me. From the state in which she had seen me two days before, she knew well in what condition I must have been, and must still be, and fearing worse might happen if I was left longer to myself, she had come to seek me to try to get me home. I have often been put to shame by my own acts, and then I was almost impervious to it; but yet I felt most

keenly and deeply when I saw her standing in the lobby of the inn waiting for me. But Menie did not say a word by way of reproach, only she looked in my face in such a pitiful way, as she took my arm and led me away, that I could scarcely keep from weeping; my eyes indeed were full of tears, as I am quite sure Menie's were also. She took me to her own place, direct; for she had a house and shop, and carried on a flourishing business in Errol now; and when I was fairly within, and the door was shut, she burst out into a flood of tears and cried,

"Oh! Steenie, Steenie, what's a' this that I hear—what's this the folk have been telling me?"

But I could not answer; all I did or could do was to fling myself down on her little sofa and weep like a child. I don't

know that those were maudlin tears—perhaps they were; I only remember this, that I felt deeply, keenly, that I had degraded myself, whatever other people might think; and though my excitable nature was still under the unnatural impetus of the previous day, revived partially this morning, I was well-nigh myself then. I suppose Menie became alarmed at the long continuance of this fit of crying, or, more likely still, her sisterly affection prompted her to comfort me—however much she was grieved with and condemned my conduct; for after a while I felt her arms about me, and heard her voice, just as if she had been tenderly trying to comfort a weeping child, saying,

“Dinna, Steenie—dinna cry so. Oh! look up, and speak to me, or you’ll break my heart.”

I turned my tear-stained face towards hers, as she put her arm round my neck; I could only say,

“Oh! Menie!—oh! Menie, what shall I do!”

“Never mind that just now, Steenie, we’ll see about a’ that again. But now, my dear brother, tell me what has happened, and why you are here, and not in Edinburgh?”

“Oh! Menie, dear, I have acted, and been acting, like an idiot. I have been so foolish as to leave Mr. Chapman.”

“But why, Steenie?” she asked, an expression of suffering crossing her face; “why did you leave Mr. Chapman’s shop?”

“Well, Menie, you see, yesterday morning I was a minute or two late—we all of us were late, but I was the last—

and Mr. Chapman was down himself, and he scolded me, and I could not stand it, so I left him in a pet."

"Without thinking of what you were to do, Steenie? Don't you mind that 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush?'"

"Yes, at the moment; but I have often thought it would be better for me to go away. I must have done it some time, and the present time is as good as any other could be."

"Oh! Steenie, how can ye say that?"

"Indeed it is; and Miss Grahame thinks so too, for I went out to her yesterday, and told her all, and she has promised to give me letters to friends she has in England, who she is sure will help me to get some employment, and she advised me to come out at once and

see you all about it. I wish I had stayed till this morning, though."

I could speak now a little more freely, but with so much of the feeling of shame still, as prevented the customary braggadocio of youth from making its appearance.

"Ay, and so it would; but why did you not come here to me last night, Steenie? Where did you sleep last night?"

I could not answer just at once—I dared not meet her eyes, which were fixed upon my face. I turned away my head, and the question was repeated before I found courage enough to say,

"A lot of my old schoolfellows, whom I overtook on the road, would have me with them for auld lang syne; and we got into a scrape, and so the police got

hold of some of us, and gave us quarters for the night in the jail; and we were taken before Sir John this morning, and——”

“ Oh ! Steenie—oh ! my dear brother, what disgrace ! What’ll my mother say ?—whatever’ll she feel about this dreadful thing ?”

I had my own bitter thoughts about that too ; I feared nothing so much as the pain this affair would cause my mother, but I felt then some little of the brag of the young man rising within me, and I said,

“ Why, we didn’t do any harm scarcely to anybody—I didn’t do any ; and everybody thinks it only a good joke—a thing to be laughed at ; the very people in the street cheered us. But I, for one, will have nothing to do with anything of the

sort again, Menie, dear—you may be sure of that."

Menie was silent for a long time. Her arm was still about me, and neither of us was crying now; but she did not speak—perhaps she felt it impossible to do so without reproving me, which she was far too affectionate to do then. At length she said,

"Well, Steenie, I dinna like such pranks; but you had better rest you here till the gloaming, and we'll go home together. You'd no care to meet Mary Leslie till you are some better. A sleep'll do you good; I fancy your bed last night would be nane o' the best."

I was very well pleased with this proposal, but not at all pleased at the notion of meeting Mary Leslie. I had no idea she was out with our people; but

I said nothing to Menie of what I felt about that. But I began, and gave her a description of the wooden bed, on which we had slept the night before. Then Menie left me laid comfortably on her sofa, covered up with a thick plaid, and went away to look after her business, and to get some dinner prepared,

I must have slept for two or three hours when Menie awoke me. When the dinner was over, she told me to go to sleep again for an hour or two longer, for she had many things to do, and could not get away till her usual business hours were past. But one can't always sleep when he wishes it, especially if he happens to be in the peculiar state I was in then ; do as I could to sleep, I only became the more restless and wakeful. My mind was now fully aroused, and,

as I lay covered up there in Menie's neat little room, my conscience began once more to assert its prerogative, and to accuse me of ill-doing, as I passed in reverie, with what coherence I could, the events of the past two days. I cannot say that I felt so keenly then the sin and folly of which I had been guilty, as I afterwards did. It was rather a dull consciousness of ill-desert than anything else; but it sufficed to keep me awake, and to that must be added the craving of an appetite yet crying out for more of the stimulants which had already so deceived or bewitched me.

When Menie had done her work for the day, and was preparing for going home, she seemed to divine something of my desire; she kindly and gently asked if it was so, and then went herself and

got me some of Scotland's panacea, which set me so far right again for the time. It would have been no trouble to me to go out; but I felt bound in honour to Menie not to do so, though personal honour in such a matter as this is generally but an empty name to one under the power of such habits as I had fallen into, and appetite generally wins the day.

So in the early gloaming of that August night we went away along the well-known road, for very nearly the last time—I thought then it would be the last time I should traverse it for many years.

CHAPTER VI.

WE reached home, Menie and I, just as it was becoming dark. I have often thought since then that it was not mere business which made my sister so anxious to wait for the gloaming, but that she wished to spare my feelings as much as possible, and to screen me from the observation of the numerous people along the road, by whom I was well known; and also that the hour of our arrival home should be so late, that I might be detained as short a time as possible under the scrutiny of Mary Leslie and my fa-

ther. I was greatly improved by the few hours' sleep I had obtained, and, save to eyes as anxious as hers and my mother's, might have passed very well as being in my usual steady condition; but I knew in myself how I was, and of course—as a person with a sense of guilt upon him always does—I fancied every other person must perceive my state as clearly as I felt it in myself.

At home there was nobody astir but my mother, and even her we found preparing to go to bed. They kept very early hours when alone in my old home. But Menie and I were very glad of this, for we feared meeting Mary Leslie then much more than meeting our good kind mother.

My mother was greatly alarmed at first by our arrival, and not very much reassured when she noticed the grave, serious

air of Menie, and the sombre aspect of myself. However, after a few general questions, which gave her so far an inkling of what was the matter, she called me her “ain puir bairn,” and set about getting some supper for us; even in this not departing from the old habit, but making a glass of toddy for me.

I have often wondered how people could cry out so against the vice, and yet put the very thing which produced and encouraged it into the hands of the fallen. After supper she sent me off to bed. I knew well that Menie would keep her up till she had told her the whole story—of what had brought me here, and what had happened to me on the road. I went to bed—that bed where Sandy and I had slept so innocently and peacefully, but whence now the innocence and peace had

departed, though I slept sound enough for some hours. Early in the morning I awoke, wondering much where I was, and how I had come there, almost as much as I had done the morning before in the Tolbooth of Errol ; however, I soon recognized the old room, and then began my punishment in reality, for the time at least, both in body and mind.

It was just as I had supposed—my mother and Menie had conversed together for hours about me before going to bed, and, consequently, there was greater silence in the house than usual in the early morning. The very silence made me more restless than I should otherwise have been, and the ticking of the clock, which alone broke it, became at last painful and unbearable ; besides, there was such an uneasy feeling about me that I could not

rest—I must get up and go out. I had no other purpose save that of walking about the fields for an hour or two, but somehow my steps were turned from the fields, and I almost unconsciously found myself going down an old and very magnificent avenue, towards the great London Road. Here some demon tempted me with the suggestion that whiskey was sold by the keeper of the turnpike a little way along the road, and that a drop would set me all right again, and make me better able to meet them all at breakfast. I had never tried anything of this kind before, but was quite familiar with the phrase, “Take a hair of the dog that bit you,” as a specific remedy for the miserable feeling of the morning after an evening’s indulgence; and therefore with, I must say, a good many doubts, and much

hesitation, which, however, appetite overruled, I drew near the place where the fire-water was to be procured.

The toll-house was situated at the point where two roads intersected each other—one leading to the principal market-town—rather a famous one in those days—of the district, the other the great highway between London and Edinburgh. This was the morning of the market-day, hence on the Santer Road there were a long string of carts laden with corn and salt, and various other articles, standing drawn up near the toll; and on the other road as many more carts and waggons from a great East Lothian distillery, laden with puncheons of whiskey, to be sent to London by the Leith smacks. The toll-house was filled to overflowing with the carters, and the noise they made was quite inde-

scribable, while their language was so coarse, so rude, and very often so profane, that I hesitated about entering the house. I knew the toll-keeper, however; though greatly surprised, as I could see, at Mrs. Ramsay's son wanting a dram so early in the morning; he did not hesitate to guide me through the men into a little sanctum of his own —his bar-room, in fact, where I sat down and got what I wanted, and soon felt so far relieved, that I got some more to make quite sure.

I waited there till the carters had gone away, and then went leisurely up the avenue again, a very different person in feeling than when I came down; I felt much more comfortable, and light, and easy, but with a humming sound in my ears, which was not so very agreeable. Ah! I did not know then, though I found it

out before the day was done, that this morning act of mine had just aroused once more the demon who had partly gone to sleep, and that, before many hours were over, I might most likely suffer more than I should have done had I stayed at home that morning.

I got into the garden unperceived, and flattered myself that no one would know where I had been or what I had been doing. As soon as it was known where I was, I was joined by Menie and Mary Leslie, who, if they did surmise anything, took no notice of it, unless I were to impute Menie's sad looks to her having some suspicion that all was not as it should be with me. I fancied she guessed that I had been adding fuel to the fire which burned within me; but I was so quiet, as I

thought, and so much more cheerful and composed, that she began to look puzzled and perplexed, especially when she saw that I was always anxious to keep to leeward of her.

Both of the girls were to start directly for Errol, and I purposed to stay at home with my mother that day. At any other time how greatly I should have been chagrined and annoyed if not permitted to accompany them, but that day I was really quite glad that they were going away. So much for the effect of drink upon a man otherwise kindly and affectionate.

We went in to breakfast. My mother met me as kindly as ever, but looked very grave. My father shook hands with me, and gave an expressive hump; and little Susie, the only one inclined to be

demonstrative, jumped into my arms and kissed me, an act of affection I could have dispensed with for the time very well. We were always rather quiet and humdrum at breakfast in our house, but this morning there was an effort to be cheerful on the part of my mother and Menie, which I was greatly pained to see, for I knew very well that it was made to try to hide the pain and fear which oppressed them from the observation of Mary Leslie and my father. Perhaps they succeeded, but I had in myself a consciousness of what I deserved, which made me not very well qualified to judge.

I volunteered to go half-way with the two girls, and my escort so far was accepted. Perhaps the hearty breakfast she had seen me make had reassured Menie

that all was right with me. So we went away more gaily than I could have thought possible an hour or two before. Till we reached the high road there was only a narrow footpath, so that we had to go in Indian file, and I did not need to approach closely to either of them; and so we continued to walk till we got to the high road, along which I purposed returning home. We had been cheerful enough on the road, and I promised, as we were parting, to come down the next afternoon and bring them home to spend the Sunday. But I was to get some intimation of Menie's fears before we separated.

"Take great care of yourself, Steenie," she said, "and try and come to some decision about what you are to do before you come for us. Take care of yourself, mind."

"Ay, Steenie, take care you don't decide to go too far away," Mary Leslie cried, laughing as she turned away.

And so we parted for the time. I set out for home up the old, well-known high-road. But there was a public-house on the way, of which I knew nothing, and, as if some evil spirit had tempted me to choose this road, an old acquaintance hailed me just as I was coming up to it.

"Bless my heart!" he cried. "Steenie Ramsay, I thought you were in Edinburgh. When did you come out here?"

"Last night, George; I've left my place in Edinburgh, and am thinking of going off to England."

"Ay, man, is't sae?—weel, come awa' in here. Sandy Paul's an old acquaintance, if no an old schoolfellow o' your ain. Come

away, man, we'll hae a glass for auld lang syne."

"No, no, it's too early," I hypocritically answered.

"Ower early!—nonsense, man! It's never ower early for a drap o' guid stuff, an' Sandy wouldna be pleased if ye passed his door for sich a nonsense reason as that. Come awa, man."

So he drew me, half reluctant, half willing, into the house; and we were very soon seated alongside the landlord, with a stoup of Scotland's curse before us. Both of these young men were quite willing to make a day of it, I could see plainly, and in honour of me, too; but I had still judgment enough left—though it was fast becoming hazy and confused—to induce me to resist remaining long or taking much. Then, pleading needful arrangements to be

made for my departure, and promising to see them both ere I went away, I got off for that time.

CHAPTER VII.

I DID not find myself in the best possible plight to go home; though I was very far from being tipsy, I was not at all as I ought to have been. Still I must go, and I thought that the best thing I could do would be to take the first word of flying, as we say in Scotland, and tell the truth as it stood—at least, in so far as regarded this meeting with George Bisset. When I entered the house, therefore, I went to my mother at once—there was nobody with her but little Susie—and said:

“Mother, dear, you must not be angry with me this time. I know I deserve your anger; but as I was coming up the road I fell in with young George Bisset, near the new public-house at the foot of the brae, and he would have me to taste with him for auld acquaintance sake. I couldn’t well refuse, and it’s that that’s kept me so long.”

“I’m no angry, Steenie, my man—I’m no angry; but I’m grieved—sore grieved—that a son o’ mine should have fallen into such temptations as ye have done. I dinna think a glass does a man ony harm—often enough it does good—but ower mony glasses is aye ill. It ruins baith soul and body, Steenie.”

“Yes, mother, I know that; God forgive me for having grieved you. And what I’ve been doing for the last few

days has been dreadful even to myself, mother dear."

"Yes, Steenie, I can believe that ; and just think what the first fruits have been—the loss of your situation, so far the loss of your character, too. You see, my man, Menie told me all about it last night."

"But, mother, I didn't lose my place, I gave it up of my own free will. I was sick tired of it, onyway ; maybe I was hasty and foolish—both, very probably I was. But Miss Grahame approved of my having done so ; and she has promised me to use her influence to get me a situation in Liverpool, which'll be far better for me than staying in Edinburgh."

"Ye didna think how we'd like you going so far away ; you didna mind us

here at home, Steenie. In Edinburgh we could see you as often as we liked, but away there you nicht as weel be at the world's end. Is it no sae, Steenie?"

"No, no, mother dear, I did think of you all ; but Miss Grahame has ever been such a kind friend, that I thought I would see what she thought about it. And then England is a better field for young Scotchmen than this country is, and Liverpool is hardly more than a day's journey off."

"Weel, weel, we'll speak of that anither time ; but, oh ! man, to think of a son of mine being lockit up a' nicht in a prison—it's like to break my very heart."

My mother here lifted up her voice and wept ; she had sent Susie away to

get ready for school when I entered. I could not comfort her for a long time; but I sat down beside her, and put my arms about her, and tried to soothe her as much as I could; and when she became more composed, I said,

“But, mother dear, it was only for a frolic; I did no ill. None of us meant to do ill; there’s not one of the lads would do a dishonourable action, I do believe, for the world.”

“Yes, it was for no great ill-doing —may the Lord be praised for that; but it was for what might have been wilful mischief, Steenie. You didna do it, but you intended it—didna ye?”

“Well, I suppose we did; but, at these rejoicing times, a great deal is allowed to young folk.”

“Maybe, my man; but when Menie

told me last night, I thought I would have broken my very heart; as for sleep, that was out o' the question. Your father, honest man, kens naething about it, and doesna need, unless he hears—which like enough he may—from somebody else, he shall never from me. So let it never be spoken of in the house, Steenie."

"I'll not do it, mother, I assure you."

"Then, Steenie, you maun promise to resist temptation, to give up this constant drinking. A glass in its way is a' weel enough, and I think little of a man who canna take or let alone as he pleases, or who canna take just what's guid for him; but constantly, and as a habit, it's dreadful. Ye should ken some of the misery it causes, for you've seen it, Steenie."

"Yes, mother, I do ; and I give you my word that I'll be careful and watch myself."

My mother had to go away to look after her household duties, and little Susie came to me before she went to school. I promised to go with her, which made her very happy and proud. Susie was not so little now, she was about twelve years old, one of the prettiest and most engaging girls of her age I have ever seen, and there had ever been the greatest affection between us since the time when I used to wander about the fields with her in my arms. It was still early in the day, and we had time to have a thorough examination of the garden, of the fruit-trees, of Susan's own particular spot especially, before it was time to go away to school. Susie had gathered a

handful of sweet-smelling flowers, and arranged them tastefully into a nice bouquet, which, in answer to my question, she said was for the mistress, and then declared she was ready to go.

The school was in a little village about a mile to the east of our house. The village lay in a quiet sequestered valley, a little removed from the public road, though one or two of its outlying houses were on the roadside. The school was kept by a lady in reduced circumstances, who eked out a small annuity by the help of the fees of the children of the better-class people round about, and gave the small country lassies a notion of good breeding, which they would never have got at home. Susie was very proud to be taken to school by her big brother, and still prouder when I said I would

come back for her in the afternoon. When I had left her at the school, I sauntered to the end of the village. Well I knew what was to be found there, and my promise to my mother pulling me one way, the appetite within me the other, as might be expected, selfishness gained the day, and in the public-house at Dolphington I was soon in a fair way of forgetting her warning, and was again feeding the fire already kindled within me. Truly it appeared as if I was about to illustrate in my own person the apostolic apothegm, "The dog has returned to his vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

I excused myself to an accusing conscience in some such way as this. I had promised to be watchful after to-day, so what I did to-day was not to be counted. And

then I reasoned that, having once confessed that I had been drinking, a little more or less was of no moment, they would never notice it at home; so without fear I freely indulged with some old acquaintances whom I found in the inn.

After dinner, for I returned home long before dinner time, where all had passed off quietly enough, save for a few very expressive humphs on the part of my father, as I gave an account of why I had left Mr. Chapman, while we were having a glass of toddy, his usual mode of finishing the meal, I went away again for Susan. As we came back along the hedge side, I saw Susie look wonderingly at me sometimes. I became very excited, and though I occasionally spoke rapidly and incoherently, the innocent girl could not guess what was wrong; though every one of us had

early become acquainted with the signs of inebriety, they had been most carefully concealed from her, and she could only wonder what it was that ailed brother Steenie. She asked me the question indeed, and I answered the dear little lassie, that it was only the pleasure of being at home again, and walking thus over the old ways with her. So we went home through those pleasant peaceful ways, which taught such a different lesson from that which I seemed so eager just then to learn.

“Ah, Steenie, you should take more care,” my mother said; “gang away and lie down for a while; I thought the toddy wouldna do you muckle good this day.”

So she sent me off into the best room, to lie down on the sofa, where I was really glad to rest myself for a time.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUT what use or profit can there be in dwelling longer on this phase of my life at home at that time? Everybody was prepared to make great allowances for me. I had so many old friends and schoolfellows, whom I had hardly ever seen since we were mere boys together, and who, now that we reckoned ourselves men and claimed the privileges of manhood, were most anxious to be kind and friendly, and their kindness, genuine as it was, invariably took more or less the form of drinking. My own family were far more put about—

after the first day—by the thought of my going far away, and the fancied disgrace of the Errol affair, than by the jollifications in which I was entangled during the few days I remained at home.

That affair at Errol was soon spread abroad over all the country, and, indeed, gave me somewhat of the character of a hero with the more unthinking of my companions. It had even got into the newspapers, though very fortunately the names were not given; but the escapade, and the fact that I was about to go to England to push my fortune, made me wonderfully popular among the young men, and hardly a single night passed on which I was not either at one house or another.

On the Saturday, after dinner, I went down to Errol with my mother's entire

approbation, for I had been at home all the morning writing letters, playing with Susie, and conversing with herself. Of course I got as much stimulant as prevented me from sinking into a nervous state—my dear mother took good care of that, and so I was enabled to get along fairly enough.

I was received by Mary and Menie with great pleasure, and having come down early to catch the post, I had an opportunity of strolling about the town, and calling on some of my old friends, while the girls were busy in the work-room and shop. I called especially on one or two of my comrades in the late prank, who, while they could not help laughing when they saw me, yet almost immediately became very grave and serious again. It turned out, however, that much as

the people of the town of the baser sort, as they were esteemed, might have cheered us that day, those of the better class, the notables of the borough, who thought themselves something, and who, moreover, had knockers and bell-pulls to lose, did not relish such kind of jokes at all ; and the names of all who had been engaged in our affair were now pretty well known.

One, a shopman with Mr. Monypenny, had actually been told that he must leave ; and the poor fellow did not know what to do, unless he went away to a strange place, and he begged me to let him go along with me wherever I went, which I very gladly agreed to do. Those of my comrades of that night who were in business for themselves, were even graver than the others, for they feared for their

trade, and only those laughed cheerily, whose parents had got us off so well, or who were quite independent of the knocker-possessing people of the town. So much for the actual and threatened consequences of a drunken spree.

"What do you think, girls?" I said, as I went back to Menie's to tea—"What do you think? All the big people in Errol are wild with anger at what was done the other night."

"And little wonder," Mary Leslie said, "little wonder, Master Andrew. How would you like people to do such things to you?"

"Yes," said Menie, in a low voice—"that's the true way to put it, Mary. 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye also unto them.' Yes —yes, Steenie; that's the true way to judge of everything."

"So it is," I answered, more taken aback than I cared either to confess or show; "but I'm afraid we are often too ready to forget that. I'm sure there was not one that night that did not firmly believe in that truth—but somehow, you see, we forgot ourselves."

"Ay, Steenie, and you ever will do so, when a number of wild young spirits meet, as you all had met that night," Menie answered; "and when you get into that state where you neither, for the time, fear God nor regard man."

"But it was only for a bit of fun," I pleaded; "and it's too hard to say all that, Menie."

"Yes, just a bit of fun; only taking, somehow, the form of wilful mischief and damage," Menie continued; "now think if that looks like fun."

“ Well, well, Menie——” I was going to speak somewhat hastily, when Mary interposed.

“ What’s done can’t be helped, and it’s no use crying over it now. But are you really and truly going away to England, Andrew?”

“ Really and truly I am. Miss Grahame strongly advises it, and for a long time I have been thinking I must do something of the kind. I should be more likely to get on there than I ever could do in Edinburgh, I fancy, Mary.”

“ And when do you mean to go?” she asked again.

“ Very shortly, Mary. I wrote to Miss Grahame to-day about the letters of introduction she promised me; and when they are ready, I’ll be ready. But my mother

says she has a great deal to do first for me, before I can make a start."

"Of course you'll need almost a new outfit," Menie said.

"No, no, Menie; very little, hardly anything; but my trunk will be out to-night, and then we'll see."

"Have you done anything in regard to Mr. Chapman?" Menie asked. "I fancy you'd be all the better of a character, or letter, from him."

"I wrote to him to-day, too. But come, it's time you were getting ready to go home—is it not?"

"Not for an hour yet," Mary said; "and it must be a very busy one, too, so take yourself off, Master Andrew, till then."

So I went out again, and wandered about the streets of the little town, buying

books for Susie, who had an inordinate appetite for all kinds of them, and doing some little business for my mother and myself until the hour had expired. We then set out for home, a far more cheerful trio than when we left it yesterday morning, and therefore much better prepared to enjoy the beauties of the scenery and the season.

It was a beautiful August evening, and the lovely country was looking its loveliest. The rich fields of Lothian, through which we passed, were luxuriantly laden with the yellow waving crops, rapidly ripening for the harvest, or standing in heavy stooks already on the ridges. The trees were yet in their fullest foliage. Those in the gardens and orchards were laden with fruit, ripe or fast coming to perfection. In the distance before us, as we went up the hill,

was that ridge along which Prince Charles led his army to the field of Preston, having the tall gaunt skeleton of the ancient stronghold right before us, looking even in the distance stern and grim. On our left hand was the Forth, with its town-fringed northern shores sinking fast into the shadow, and that watchman of the deep, Inchkeith, just becoming visible, and telling that the sun had set. Behind us was the huge mass of Arthur's Seat, and the gaunt columns of the so-called National Monument on the Calton Hill, clearly relieved against the ruddy western sky, while the smoke of the city could be seen rising in blue wreaths behind. It was a scene once seen never to be forgotten, and one well calculated to give ease to troubled minds, and fresh elasticity to youthful hearts. No wonder, then, that we went up these

well-known braes with a cheeriness which only yesterday I had thought impossible could ever be mine again, and that we reached home with fresh hopes, and, so far as I myself was concerned, with fresh resolves and purposes.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE Saturday night, passed in such a hopeful spirit, prepared us well for the coming of the Sabbath. The Sunday morning opened calm and fair and bright. The fresh, soft morning air was filled with the sweet sounds of the birds singing in the trees and hedges, of bees humming about the flowers, and over all at intervals the distant sound of the church bells of the great city, and of the borough of Errol; so that one's spirit was soothed and solemnized, and brought into something like harmony with the purpose of the day.

My brother Sandy was to come out that morning. Poor fellow, he was harder kept at work, with longer hours than I ever had been, and much less frequently got home; but he very much liked his masters and his occupation, even though the hours were long and the labour hard, and the drudgery far from pleasant. His masters seemed to like him too, for he seldom came out home without bringing some small token of their favour, if it was only a packet of sweeties for little Susie. "Ah! there he comes," some one cried, "and somebody with him." All the way from Leith, good eight miles, before breakfast, though the two lads coming along the road in the distance had been on foot and working hard for eighteen hours the day before, and only got to bed at one o'clock that morning.

"Blessings on his bonnie face," said my mother, when I told her, and she had come out for a moment from superintending the preparation of a somewhat extra breakfast for this particular morning. "Blessings on him, it 'll be one of his neighbours that he's aye been speaking of bringing out wi' him."

And we young people go to the head of the dark narrow lane, into which, under the shadow of the tall overarching trees, they have just entered; and Sandy sees the light dresses of the girls, and hurries on, while his comrade seems somewhat bashful and inclined to lag behind; but Sandy drags him on, and they soon emerge from the sombre shadow of the trees into the open space at the end of the house—for it stands with its gable to the lane—and there meets us all, and

presents his friend, who is soon put at his ease by my mother's warm, cordial welcome.

"Steenie, man, is that you?" Sandy cries, as he comes forward to shake hands with me. "I'd nae notion o' seeing you here this day."

I could only smile faintly.

"As little had I, Sandy, when I saw you last; but you see I'm here for all that, and have been for some days."

"Ay, have ye, though? Weel, weel, never mind the noo. This is Mr. Tom Hislop, Steenie, my neighbour. But when did you come, Steenie?"

"On Thursday night."

Sandy gave me a keen, amazed look.

"Then have you left your place?"

"Yes, Sandy, lad; I left on Wednesday last, and I mean to go away to England."

"To England ! Guid preserve us ! what's put that into your head?"

Sandy's mouth was shut; there was no help for it at present, but to follow my mother and the stranger, whom Sandy characterised as a "real decent chield." On our way back we met the girls, who had fallen behind on account of Sandy's friend. For the first time for years we were now all met together at home; for, somehow, it had never happened that the day I could get away coincided with the one on which Sandy's turn came.

We formed, on the whole, though a very sedate, a much happier party at breakfast than I expected would have been the case. Sandy's arrival enlivened us all. Even my quiet father was more demonstrative than usual; and Tom Hislop,

though wonderfully bashful and out of sorts at first, gradually brightened up. Poor fellow! he did not often sit at such a breakfast-table, nor had he often met two such girls as Mary Leslie and my sister Menie, I felt quite sure of that. But, by-and-bye, before the meal was over, he began to lose the fear of hearing his own voice, which appeared to have possessed him for a time.

After breakfast was over, the question of going to church arose. The church our people attended lay two or three miles to the east of our place; and as the minister was anything but a good preacher, there was no great attraction in that respect. Neither my father nor mother could go that day. Sandy declared he would not. It would be hard enough for them to walk back to Leith at night, without

going three miles to hear a sleepy preacher and a poor sermon, when Tom and he every Sunday heard one of the very ablest men in the Church. The two lassies and myself therefore were the only members of the family that would go to church that day. Even Susie wished to be at home with Sandy.

We went away through those delightful fields, along the narrow kirk road, now amid waving corn, and under the shade of stately trees, or by the side of the murmuring burn—now through the rich clover, anon by the hedge-side, in which the bramble and the sloe were fast ripening, and briony, and hosts of other creeping plants, gave variety and luxuriance to the foliage. It was a lovely morning and a most pleasant walk—all the more pleasant to me from the fact that I felt more quiet

and composed, and that the girls were apparently just as free and happy with me as ever.

We reached the coal region at last. When we got to the top of Birsley brae, and before us lay the ugly town or village of Tranent, with its church on a little rising ground at the lower end, looking over the plain where Sir John Cope was defeated by Prince Charles Edward. In this very churchyard which we were about to pass through, the cannon of the Highlanders had been placed, and the bell which, with feeble cracked voice, was summoning the people to church, had, on that memorable day, suffered from a cannon shot fired by Cope's artillerymen, and ever since had lost its voice. Both Menie and I well knew what we had to expect in the way of sermon, and we

had so well prepared Mary, that none of us were disappointed at the sleepy discourse of the sleepy preacher, as Sandy had very well styled both the man and his homily.

Usually our people waited for the afternoon-service ; but as Sandy was at home, and as it might be years before we all met again in our father's house, we remained long enough to visit our baby brother's grave, and to read there the short epitaph of Philip Ramsay, aged so many weeks and days, and then set off home. We went by a different route from the road we had come, in order to give Mary Leslie a new view of the country. We went along the top of the high grounds, towards the old castle of Faside, which I have made mention of before ; and all the rich country between the ridge and the sea seemed

to lie at our feet, bathed in the glorious sunshine of that Sabbath-day, like a gorgeously variegated carpet—as fine a scene, in its own way, as eye could find in the old world, I believe, and quite as full of historic memories as most. There were battle-fields, ruined castles, the residences of men of science, art, literature, and arms; and the paths by which armies had marched to triumph or defeat. The house of Carbury, where the hapless Mary Stuart was taken by the stern Lords of the Congregation, after her unfortunate marriage with Bothwell, was quite within our vision that day; and Edinburgh, with its guardian hills, shut in the westward view. Then there was the long low slope northwards to the Forth, and beyond the shores and hills of Fife closing in the scene. Take it all in all, I do believe

there are few scenes like this; and so thought Mary Leslie that day.

We meant to turn off and go down the hill-side, when just right above our own house, for the time was flying fast. The road along the top of the hill was one of the old Roman roads, but had lost much of its distinctive character by the wear and tear of centuries. The path by which we were to descend the hill was of the very opposite description. It was an old horse-road, known ages ago to freebooters, and more recently to smugglers, proceeding the highest way towards the English border. In some places it was worn ten or twelve feet down into the brow of the hill, and was seldom used now, except by people on foot, or driving cattle from field to field. To the botanist, it would have been a kind of Elysium, for

all sorts of native ferns and plants grew in the ditches and along the banks on either side. When we reached the top of this narrow defile, we met Sandy and his friend, Susie being also with them.

Sandy could not go to church—the scamp; but he could drag Tom Hislop to these hills, and through those rough lanes, quite as far, if not further, than if he had gone with us.

“I didna care to gang to the kirk,” was his laughing answer, when Menie spoke to him; “we get plenty o’ kirk gaen at ither times—dinna we, Tam?”

Tom assented, and we set off down the steep lane, Mary and I leading the way, arm in arm, for she needed my aid, especially here. And so we reached home.

After dinner we separated into groups, which were continually changing their com-

ponent parts, as well as the subjects discussed, till tea-time. All the afternoon I saw very little of my mother. She was, for a long time, engaged with Sandy's friend, hearing, what pleased her greatly, a most flattering account of Sandy, and receiving various kindly messages with which Tom had been entrusted by the wife of the senior partner, in whose house they lived, which greatly delighted her. The lad, with a delicacy I hardly expected, then asked me to show him something of which he had heard Sandy speak, evidently to give the mother freedom to rejoice over her son. I was quite pleased, and went away with him to point out the more immediate objects of interest, and especially the mysterious old house among the trees.

.. But the time was fleeting fast away,

and the two lads had a long walk before them, yet they stayed till the last available minute—so late, indeed, as to render the usual practice of the household on such occasions impracticable.

Our people were in the habit of convoying their friends for a mile or two when they departed. With Sandy and myself that was generally impossible; we liked home so well that we invariably stayed till the last possible moment. It fell to me alone, therefore, to see them fairly on the road; and, with a whispered caution from Menie not to go far, and to be soon back, we set off.

We went away at a great rate, until we came to a short cut, which would save them about a mile, where I was to part with them. All the way down Tom Hislop was eloquent about the attention

he had received, and all that he had seen that day. It seemed that my father, though it was Sunday, had taken the two through the works with which he was connected, and which, at any rate, he had to visit himself. Tom had never seen anything like them before, and was, therefore, loud in his admiration. But he was far more taken with my mother's kindness, and he even appeared affected by it. When we parted I promised to call and see them before I left Scotland; and they went away with merry hearts at a rattling pace, while I, more slowly, returned home, which I reached in good time at last, even to the satisfaction of Menie.

CHAPTER IX.

AT home we were now all very busy preparing for my departure. My clothes underwent a complete overhaul, and it was found that I required very little addition to the stock I had always managed to keep up.

Mr. Chapman answered my letter promptly. He sent me a very good certificate of character, indeed, and did not allude to the petulance I had manifested when I left him, nor to its evident cause. He sent me besides a letter of recommendation to a house in Liverpool, with one

of the partners in which he was acquainted.

From Miss Grahame there was no word, so that by the middle of the week I became somewhat anxious, and was very desirous to go into Edinburgh to see her; but my mother persuaded me to stay at home for the time—her ostensible reason being that it would look too importunate to hurry Miss Grahame in such a way. Her real reason I could very easily guess.

I went into Errol nearly every day for an hour or two. Mary Leslie was there, living with Menie still. It was the pleasantest part of the time I spent at home, for Mary and I had many long, delightful walks together about the pretty environs of the town. We never spoke of love. I dared not do it, indeed, but I

fancy we suspected correctly enough the true state of our feelings towards each other. I felt quite another man while with Mary, and, but for my folly of the previous week, I have no doubt now I should have spoken out freely all that was in my heart, but I dared not do it in the circumstances in which I then stood.

Almost every evening there were parties of my old acquaintances to which I was invited. Very homely, no doubt, but all with the kindly purpose of testifying their friendly feelings and good wishes. Going to England was a very different thing then from what it is now, when railways have created such an entire revolution in the travelling habits of the people; and as going to the West of England was a very unusual circumstance indeed among the East coast people, I was regarded by the

simple country folk very much as we now regard people setting out for Australia or British Columbia. Hence all their farewell meetings.

I kept myself much more correct than I had done the previous week, however, and was seldom at all excited, even at night. Neither my mother nor Menie ever disapproved of these parties, though they both knew well what was the chief occupation at them. I could see Menie's eyes brighten when she saw me coming into her place day after day so steady, and, as it seemed, always becoming steadier. Alas! she did not know how strong the desire was still, and that the least extraordinary temptation would bear me down before it quite as fast as formerly.

When the end of the week approached

I became quite impatient—so much so, that my mother agreed that I should go to Edinburgh on the Saturday, if we did not hear before that time. Accordingly, on the Saturday morning, as there were no letters, I set out. I called on Menie as I passed through Errol, and promised to be back in time to take Mary Leslie and her home in the evening. I had many things to do, but the chief was to see the ladies at Meadowside, and make sure of the letters they had promised me.

Both of them were at home, and they received me as usual with the greatest kindness, which even my folly had never induced them to alter, though I felt myself how little I deserved it. Miss Grahame, with great thoughtfulness, had been engaged in procuring recommendatory

letters for me from various gentlemen of their acquaintance, which she fancied might be more useful to me than her own.

"For you see, Andrew," she said, "an old woman like myself is not in the way of being useful in return for any favour that might be granted; but these gentlemen in business are, and a request from such as them will have more weight, and be more likely attended to, than one of mine."

"I'm not quite sure of that, Miss Graham," I answered; "their letters are not likely to have any heart in them, for they will just be dry matter of business productions. They will be called esteemed favours when acknowledged, and will be thrown aside at once. I would rather trust to one from you than half a dozen from dry business men."

They both laughed ; and then Miss Burns said,

" But, Andrew, what influence can old maids like us have with such people as Liverpool magnates ? Many of the persons we did know may have forgotten us, or, at least, have ceased to care for us."

" I don't think that's possible, Miss Burns," I said—" I don't think any one who once knew you could ever forget or cease to care for either Miss Grahame or yourself."

Miss Burns coloured highly, and then suddenly became as pale as death ; but she did not answer me. Miss Grahame did, however, watching her niece anxiously all the while, for the remark I had made had awakened some old remembrance, I suppose.

" Why, Andrew, you have become quite

a proficient in flattering people, I see," she said. "Well, we'll try what we can do ourselves, and the other letters may not be so much amiss either. You shall have both; and so more probabilities than one. When would you like to go away?"

"Whenever I can, ma'am."

"Well, in the beginning of the week you'll come in again, and we'll have them ready for you, Andrew."

"Thank you, Miss Grahame. I do not know how to express my gratitude for all the favours you have conferred upon me, and for the many, many pleasant and happy hours I have enjoyed here."

I felt much affected at the reflection that those happy evenings had come to an end, and my conscience troubled me about the little thought I had lately had

regarding them. Both the ladies were considerably affected too ; but Miss Grahame answered—

“Just say nothing about it, Steenie. You have given us great pleasure, and been a great comfort to us in our lonely life. Let us only hear that you are continuing to do well ; and nothing possible will give Phemie and myself more or greater pleasure.”

“Yes, indeed, Andrew ; only be careful, be industrious, and let us hear of your well-doing, and that will be the greatest pleasure you can confer upon us,” Miss Burns added.

“By-the-bye,” said Miss Grahame, “have you had any communication with Mr. Chapman ?”

“Yes, ma’am,” I answered ; “I wrote him for a character, and he has given

me a far better one than I fancy I deserved ; and a letter, besides, to a company in Liverpool, in our own trade."

"But I thought," Miss Grahame said, "that you did not care about following it any longer. The letters I shall give you will be to merchants, or those who have influence with merchants, and not to shopkeepers."

"It is quite true, Miss Grahame ; I would far rather do something else than go behind a counter in a shop again, but it is quite possible such a letter might be very useful if I failed in other respects."

"Very true and very prudent, Andrew."

We then settled down into more general conversation, Miss Burns giving me a great deal of good counsel, and warning me against the danger I might have to

meet, alone and in a strange place—especially against the temptations of such a town as Liverpool. Miss Grahame advised me to connect myself at once with one of our own churches there, as the best possible safeguard, and said I should go to the Doctor and get a certificate of my church membership before I left, for that of itself would be a recommendation to many of the Scottish merchants, better than any other. Altogether these two ladies treated me just as if I was a younger brother, rather than a lad they had picked up almost on the street, a draper's message-boy. They insisted that I should come back to dinner, which they would have at any hour that would suit me; and then I went away, as much affected almost as if I were leaving my father's house never to return.

I called at the old place in the Lawn-market, to thank Mr. Chapman, and bid farewell to my old comrades. They were all quite curious about me, and as Mr. Chapman was not in, we had some talk about my prospects and hopes before he appeared. He received me kindly enough, and hoped I would do well; his friend was one of the most considerable people in the trade, he said, who also employed a great number of shopmen, and did business of a very much better description than his, but conducted on the same principles; then hoping to hear that I was doing well, he dismissed me. I shook hands with them all, and went away. It was the final severance of the tie which bound me to the trade, I thought, and to that famous street; and it was with reflections much more melancholy than I

could have fancied possible, that I left the Lawnmarket for the last time, and turned into a place where I could get some refreshment,

I got all my business done easily and in good time, and went out to dinner at Meadowside quite early enough. I left in time to get the evening coach for Errol. This was a precautionary measure in a great degree. Had I walked out, I should have found temptations lurking at every corner, and I had judgment enough to see that by taking the coach I could easily avoid them all. Both Mary Leslie and Menie were delighted when I entered the shop before the appointed hour; and when we set off for home, we were far more happy and at peace than we had been only one short week before.

CHAPTER X.

I PASS over the days which intervened before the one fixed for departure came. They passed quickly, oh! so quickly. I had been in to Edinburgh again, and Miss Grahame had given me a large packet of letters when I bade them a final farewell. On that occasion I had gone to Leith, and had obtained permission from Sandy's employers for him to come to see me off. All the preliminaries thus arranged, there fell upon us all a kind of melancholy calm, common enough in such households as ours, when all things are ready, and one is

about to depart on the morrow to embark alone in his warfare with the world. I believe this calm is only a kind of intensified though suppressed excitement.

During these latter days Mary Leslie and I were a great deal together. I do believe she was as conscious of her peculiar feelings towards me as I was of mine towards her, but it was rather like brother and sister than lovers that we spoke to each other; and when the time of parting came, we separated unpledged, and with no word of love spoken. I had had a long serious conference with my mother. My young acquaintances, as used to be always the case in Scotland, had given me a parting supper, and all was over. I was ready to depart on the morrow for the unknown land.

It is needless to dwell on my last night

at home, or even on the final parting at the Canal Basin next day, which was very painful to us all. We got it over, however; the inexorable time came, and I must go away. My friend Erskine joined me at the canal boat, and we departed amid the tears and sobs of the two little companies, his and mine, drawn together to bid us farewell.

We reached Glasgow about dusk, and after some little difficulty got lodgings in a small inn near the Broomielaw. Temperance hotels were unknown in those days, and our finances could ill afford the better-class houses. In the morning, after an early breakfast, we set out to see as much of the town as possible before the steamer sailed. She did not leave the quay till the afternoon, so that we had time to visit the grand old cathedral, and Knox's Monu-

ment in the Necropolis. We walked through street after street, admiring here James Watt sitting in a Roman toga designing a steam-engine, there the fine new Exchange, and many other of the most marked monuments and wonders of the City of St. Mungo. What most specially struck both Erskine and myself was the great crowds and the immense traffic on the principal streets, the multitude of tall chimneys and the broad deep river. We had no idea of anything like these from our East country experience, and, like young men rather green, we became quite bewildered, and more than once had to ask our way before we reached our inn again. When we had dined, we got our luggage taken to the steamer, and two or three hours before the proper hour of sailing we were to be seen sitting on our chests on

the forecastle of the *John Wood*, bound for Liverpool.

The steamer left the quay about four o'clock in the afternoon of a glorious August day. By this time our spirits, which had been rather depressed all the previous day, had recovered their wonted tone again, and we were as joyous and careless as we could well be. Before sailing—following the example set us by fellow-passengers who seemed quite accustomed to the voyage—we had gone ashore and laid in a good stock of both eatables and drinkables—we were only steerage passengers—to serve us during the voyage. I never shall forget that passage down the Clyde while I live. After we had seen our luggage secure, and were able to give our attention to the scene, we went as far forward as we could, to enjoy uninter-

riptedly the varying beauties of the river banks. Now on the one side, now on the other, objects of beauty and interest became successively visible. Here a beautiful park with mansion house and noble trees, there an old ruined castle; and then came Dumbarton's rifted rock, and the hills of Argyle closing in the whole. Port Glasgow, with its shipping, and the beautiful sloping hills behind clothed with wood. In that lovely day, and to our simple minds, all was the perfection of beauty.

We arrived at Greenock a little before sunset, and there the steamer lay alongside the quay for some hours. It was quite bewildering all this novelty, but the delay in many respects was most tantalizing. Some of our fellow-passengers had told us that the beauty and grandeur of the river scenery was in its greatest perfection lower

down. However, as we could not help ourselves, we went ashore for an hour, and had something like supper, to prepare us for the night voyage. Greenock is by no means the prettiest town in the world, especially if seen, as we saw it, in a drizzling rain, said to be its normal condition too; but the novelty pleased us, and we returned on board very hearty, as the saying is, and ready for everything.

When we were once more on board we went below, but the first glance into the fore-cabin checked us for the time. It was dark, close, hot, and stifling, to all appearance absolutely without ventilation, and nearly filled with human beings. But the rain came down heavier, and we must find some shelter. We stationed ourselves under the lee of the paddle-box for a time, but very soon a number of unfortunates, like ourselves,

assembled there, and the crew and porters, completing the lading of the vessel, were continually passing and repassing, and driving the poor passengers against each other in a very disagreeable way, so that Erskine and I ventured down below.

It was a strange scene. A low, small, dark room, having benches running all round. The whole middle space was vacant, and lighted by a dim lamp swinging from the centre, which did no more than make darkness visible at the sides and in the corners, so that the greatest care and closest scrutiny were required to keep you from sitting down on the top of some luckless wight. At present all were merry enough, and little groups were formed here and there, discussing their suppers, or, more frequently still, engaged in drinking. There was a fiddler playing a brisk tune,

a reel, if I mistake not, and two or three couples were dancing in the middle of the floor. I was more attracted, however, as soon as my eyes became accustomed to the light, by a small, disconsolate-looking party—a family, evidently—who seemed dreadfully out of sorts and out of keeping with such a place. These were emigrants on their way to the new world.

We soon became used to the closeness and heat of the place, and would have been pleased enough to have joined in the fun going on, but for the fearful language; the oaths and execrations, of the groups who surrounded the fiddler. As it was, we succeeded in getting a corner to ourselves, and sat down. We could soon see pretty well in the dim light, and distinguish those around us. We set to, therefore, to speculate about our fellow-passengers—what

might be their trades or occupations, and the purpose of their journey. Of course this was very ridiculous on the part of boys like us, but it helped to fill up the time pretty well.

A great many new passengers had come on board at Greenock, and we soon learned from their conversation that they were mechanics, on their way to England in quest of work. All the passengers seemed very jolly, and some of them appeared to take great delight in profane and obscene language, the new-comers most of all. I suppose this was caused, or, anyway, made more apparent from the circumstance that there were so many of them together who knew one another; or, mayhap, as the cock is said to crow loudest on his own dunghill, perhaps these Greenockians blasphemed more because they were at their

own quay. Whatever the cause, it is a fact that they utterly shocked both Erskine and myself, and we resolved rather to walk the deck all night than listen to such fearful execrations any longer.

The *John Wood* had cast off from the quay by the time we reached the deck. The rain had almost ceased, so that passing the night on deck seemed no such great matter after all. We could easily have obtained beds—various of the crew offered us their bunks for a consideration—but we preferred walking the deck, which, as we got away from the town, was far from being unpleasant. It was clear moonlight, and so long as the Clyde continued narrow, the faint view we could obtain of either side was very fine; and the successive sparks of fire, as they appeared before us, and quickly disappeared astern, gave

an air of romance to the whole, as if they were something of the nature of the famous Turnberry beacon which guided Robert Bruce to his ancestral castle.

How frequently does the plainest practical matter-of-fact affair give an additional picturesqueness to a landscape—as, for instance, in the case of railways, which, it was prophesied, would destroy all the beauty of the land through which they passed, yet everybody knows how utterly contrary this is to fact. So with these warders of the deep.

We had recourse to the once famous maxim, and kept our spirits up by pouring spirits down, until, I am afraid, we became so useless on deck, that we were glad to find our way below again somehow. The fore-cabin was closer and more stifling than before, but we cared less

about that now, or perceived it less, and, having found a vacant place among the sleepers, we composed ourselves and tried to sleep. We did obtain a few hours of disturbed slumber, but were awoke again about daybreak.

When I awoke, the head of a very nice-looking girl was resting on my shoulder, and so I remained fixed for some time, not to disturb her, till she turned over again towards her father, murmuring some name, which I could not think was his. When Erskine and I reached the deck, we were both dreadfully thirsty, and very hungry; and, early as it was, we quenched our thirst in the only way in which its unnatural character could for the time be quenched. Perceiving some of our fellow-passengers with tins filled with hot coffee, we, too,

found our way to the galley where it was being dispensed, and got what with our own stores enabled us to make a good sort of breakfast.

But all around us was fog—not very dense, it is true, but still it limited the view, and the captain was compelled to proceed with caution, ringing the bell every few minutes. So it continued till we reached the Mersey, up the intricate channels of which river the pilot seemed to grope his way very carefully—noting the depth of water, and the colour of the huge floating buoys we passed on either side, and causing the ship to be kept at a low speed. I did not know anything of those dangerous banks then, but afterwards I did, and with my own eyes have seen them prove fatal to many ships and men.

My first notion that we were approaching a town was from seeing a number of round towers, with huge black arms projecting into the air. I had seen windmills before, and knew that these were such, but the number congregated together greatly struck all those who, like Erskine and myself, came from a land of burns, and streams, and rivers. Then, as we drew out of the region of fog, and the long stretch of docks, opened with the black town behind, we could form no idea of the vastness of everything before us—we gave up as hopeless any attempt to do so. It was far too vast, this long line, to us, to whom Leith Docks and Leith Pier were most wonderful triumphs of engineering skill; we must be content to be as much pygmies in this vast place, we fancied, as our cherished

favourite when contrasted with these. But we were soon ashore, and very thankful I was that our bottles had been emptied and thrown overboard, when I saw the strict search made and the petty seizures effected by the Excise on the Liverpool Quay.

CHAPTER XI.

OUR first care, after we had got our luggage out of the Excise officer's hands, was to make sure of a lodging for the night. One of our fellow-passengers had recommended us to go to an inn just across the street from the docks, where he said we would be comfortable, and, at the same time, not charged very highly, which was to us an important consideration.

We got hold of a porter, therefore—not such an easy matter when there was half a dozen of the fraternity pulling at you at once—and at last found our way

ANDREW RAMSAY OF ERROL

We had our luggage sent up to the bedroom we were to occupy and, after a short while when we both very much wanted to go to the coffee-room and have a drink, it was a very good one and better than those we had been accustomed to there. We sat about talking and this as comfortable as possible until the tea from the service was brought in the crowded room. I had a very good time.

As we had time we decided to walk for a time and so we took up with the service. I

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like to do that. Our heads were still dizzy, and we seemed to feel the heaving motion of the ship, and to have the sound of the engines ringing in our ears, as we walked along the streets.

Both of us were fully convinced that we should meet numberless rogues, and therefore that it behoved us to be very watchful and on our guard against their machinations. The most incredible stories were current among our people at home of the snares and pitfalls which wicked people in those great towns, both in Scotland and England, were continually laying for the heedless and unwary ; and these stories were received with such implicit faith, that, notwithstanding my Edinburgh experience, I could not altogether resist them.

I don't doubt but in a degree, many people, living by their wits, lay themselves out

to entrap and fleece the foolish and unthinking ; and the papers are continually showing that such is the case still, more or less ; but I never met with any such persons, in my experience, at least, of that class of deceivers we were so especially on our guard against that day. We wandered about, therefore, at our own sweet wills, resolved to have intercourse with no one ; and, truly, we met with no one seeking to entrap us, though we must have looked raw and strange enough.

Our first ideas of the town of Liverpool were not very favourable to it, either in a picturesque or in a practical point of view. We passed through street after street, depreciating the town immensely ; and really the contrast between our lofty white stone edifices and those dingy red brick houses was very marked and striking, and I

have little doubt will invariably be the most noticed feature of an English town to a native Scotchman. What we saw that afternoon I cannot very well tell. The general ideas of dinginess and vastness were by much the most predominant; but I am not going to attempt anything like a description of Liverpool—it has been done already by far abler hands than mine.

We inquired our way to Lord Street, where the shop of the firm was situated to which Mr. John Chapman had given me a letter. It was a very large place, we found, and seemed quite to come up to Mr. Chapman's description.

"You should try your luck there," I said to Erskine; "once get in there and you'd be sure to get on."

"Yes; but whatna chance is there for the like o' me in such a grand place as

that? Just think o' the puir auld place in Errol—besides that, I don't think I could venture to ask, even if I tried."

" You've got a good character, havena you? You'd be content with small wages at first, wouldna you? Depend on it, there's many things to be done in that place that you could do, Erskine."

" Wages, for a time, I dinna care about, except just to live; and Mr. Monypenny—though angry at our mad folly that night, or feared for the consequences of it—has treated me very well. But arena ye going to try your hand in there yoursel'? I thought ye had a letter to them?"

" So I have; but I don't know yet. I'll see about that in a day or two. The letters I have are more to merchants and shipowners. I don't care about following out our trade now."

"You're a queer chap, Ramsay; what set ye to the business, man, if ye dinna mean to stick by it."

"Why, I was quite indifferent. I didn't care what I learnt there. I didna get my own wish, and so I let our people decide for me. What I would like, is to get among ship work on shore now, since I couldn't get off to sea then."

We were growing tired with our walk, and so turned into one of those flaring places, a public-house or gin-palace—the first we had ever entered. They were at that time very much more modest and quiet than they are now. It was a beautiful place. I suppose we had wandered from the good into one of the lower quarters of the town; indeed I have since found out that such was the case, though,

from the appearance of the street so far, we did not fancy it. There was a long bar, as high as one's breast, covered with zinc, stretching from end to end of the place. There were two or three separate entrances from different streets, for it was a corner house. When we entered, the wide space in front of this bar was filled with a mixed multitude of disreputable-looking people. It seemed to me, indeed, as if all the maimed, the halt, and the blind in Liverpool were congregated there, along with a goodly proportion of stalwart labourers and haggard-looking men and women. We were quite astounded, and not a little horrified, at the scene, and Erskine was for drawing back at once; the atmosphere was foul enough from tobacco-smoke, and the steam arising from wet rags and filthy bodies, to induce one

to do so ; but I held him fast, to have a good look at the place and the company. Behind the bar were a number of large tuns or vats, and various smaller ones, with distinct and characteristic names painted on them, while a goodly store of bottles, large and small, loaded shelves in every space where one could be placed. Along the inner front of the bar were a great number of small brass taps and glittering pump handles, the use of which I did not understand, for as yet these machines were unknown, or, at least, not commonly seen, in Edinburgh ; but we were not long left in ignorance, as many of them seemed to be in constant employment, and our modest request for two glasses of ale called another into play. There seemed to be work enough, and hard work too, for three or four men, who, without their

coats, and with their shirt-sleeves buckled up, appeared, from their flushed and heated faces, to have enough to do to supply the wants of that seething, sweltering mass. That scene ought to have made one take a disgust at drink for his lifetime. Certainly none could see these men behind the bar, and that festering, blaspheming crowd before it, without coming to the conclusion that the trade must be a most profitable one, which could induce men to endure such scenes, and live in such an atmosphere as this, polluted to such a degree, both morally and physically, as it appeared to me to be.

After a good deal of trouble we found our way back to our inn; we had lost our way, and got among a dense mass of the lowest streets of that end of the town, and it was only when we found the line of

docks again that we felt right. By keeping along the outer wall of these we reached the inn safely, but all along the road we passed houses of the same description as the one we had entered—houses flaring with gas, and resounding with the noise of music and dancing, for this was more especially the sailors' quarter. We could hear the strains of music, and in many cases the upper rooms were lighted up, and the shadows of figures moving in the dance flitted ever and anon across the windows, all telling of that factitious mirth and jollity which is so heartless, and in many, very many cases, leads to such sure destruction.

But neither Erskine nor I was much in a moralizing mood at that time. We did not seek to mingle then with either the grave or the gay, yet we could not help

laying up those materials on which we should moralize at a future time, when, perchance in weakness and sorrow, we should find that even we ourselves had not come scathless out of scenes very near akin to the vice and riot of these. Both of us, then, were too much fatigued by our travel, and the excitement had exhausted us so much, that, after a slight supper and a glass of toddy, which we thought it necessary to call for, for the good of the house, we were fain to go to bed.

CHAPTER XII.

IT was late next morning before we betook ourselves to the street again. I had had some conversation with the landlady—a Scottish woman, and immediately interested in us as her countrymen—about the most likely place to obtain decent lodgings till we should see what we were to do. She gave me the addresses of two or three Scottish people, and put us in the right way to find out the streets; and we went away, anxious to have a quiet lodging, where we could live cheaply—for the expense of the inn, however moderate it might

be, would soon have exhausted our funds, and neither of us could guess how long we should have to wait before we heard of anything to do.

We called at a great many houses, and were not greatly pleased with any of the rooms we saw ; but we agreed for what we considered the best one of them all, in a clean-looking house a good way from the docks, and were to enter on possession that night. We were a good deal astonished with one thing, however, both as giving evidence of the sharp practice sometimes carried on in Liverpool, and of the necessity people felt of being on their guard against it. Scotchmen as we were, and going to the house of a Scotchman, we were required to pay a week's rent in advance, though our luggage was worth more than a hundred times the

amount. However, we took the room on the terms specified, and then set about seeing the town again.

My—I may say our—object this time was to find out, first of all, the streets in which those people lived to whom Miss Grahame had given me letters of recommendation. Those to her own friends first of all, for I had more hope from them than from the others. It took us two or three hours to find out the streets, for the letters were addressed to the ladies at their private residences, though they were expected to have influence on the gentlemen in their counting-houses. It did not take near so much trouble to find out the offices to which my other letters were directed, as they were mostly close together in the streets near the Exchange. Having found out thus definitely the

places I had to go to, we resolved to devote the rest of the day to visiting the docks and seeing all that could be seen. After a cheap dinner, therefore, at an eating-house, we set out and did the lions, looked at the public buildings—the huge pile of the Custom-house then being the greatest lion of the lot—and when wearied with the incessant recurrence of dock after dock, lines of ships after lines of ships, and deafened by the tremendous roar of the streets, we were fain to take refuge in our inn again.

I had to write home, both to tell them that we had arrived in safety, and that we had been successful in getting good lodgings. Of course I wrote to the ladies at Meadowside at the same time. To Menie I did not write, anxious as I was to let both Mary Leslie and her know of my safe

"My father and mother, of course, and to them all at home as well."

"Well, begin 'Dear Father'—or, better still, 'My Dear Father'—there's no need for any more."

"I don't know that; should it not rather be father and mother?"

"As you please; but if you write to your father, you write to your mother too—for they are one flesh, aren't they?"

"Yes, so they are."

"Well, then, that'll do; or stop, say 'My Dear Parents'—what do you think of that?"

"Capital! that's the very thing, and then they'll be both pleased."

And Erskine squared his left arm, and brought the right one close to his side, according to the most approved method in our

Scottish schools, and painfully and most laboriously began. The fellow wrote a beautiful hand, too. I used to fancy that it would have been the making of me, if I could have written as well. Having finished and sealed up my letters, while he had scarcely made any progress, I left him biting the end of his pen in the effort to hammer out something, and strolled across to the steamboat dock. There was a policeman on duty at the gate, who was examining very strictly and sharply with his eyes a number of passengers, who, if one might judge from their appearance, had newly landed from an Irish boat. One of these, a very stout little man in body, but with a very singularly thin and wizened face, when contrasted with his flourishing corporation, seemed to attract the officer's attention greatly; and when the Irishman

was going to pass out of the gate the constable approached, and gave him a sharp rap with his knuckles on the side, which gave back a clear metallic sound, very different from that which usually follows a rap in the ribs.

"Hullo ! what's this?" the policeman cried, stopping the man.

"An' sure that's nothin' to you," was the answer, in an Irish brogue, which I cannot imitate.

"That's my look-out," the officer replied. "You must stop here, my man, for a little."

"Sure, now, you might let me pass this once."

The Irishman sidled close up to the policeman, and, I could see, began to wheedle, or, at least, to try to wheedle, him. It was quite evident, however, that

the officer was neither to be blarneyed nor bribed.

"No, I tell you no," he said. "Come, let us see what's this you've got stowed away so nicely."

One of the Excise searchers, who was on duty, came up, along with his superior officer, whom the policeman had sent for ; and in the hut at the dock entrance these officials uncased the son of Erin, the front of whose person was fitted most artistically with tin cases, capable of holding a considerable quantity of whiskey, and so remarkably well adjusted that they only gave him the appearance of a very stout, very stiff little man, whom only such people as the lynx-eyed guardians of the docks could have detected. The only mistake the smugglers had made was in not choosing a man with a fuller face, for this

poor fellow's countenance was not at all in keeping with his paunch. I shall not soon forget the woe-begone aspect of the poor fellow, as he appeared without his flasks, so thin, so miserable-looking was he. He had gone into the hut a very stout fellow, indeed, for his size, and, to the great amusement of the crowd which gathered in the meantime to see the fun, he issued forth a mere withered atom. As this was a direct case of attempted smuggling, the poor wretch was marched off to the police office, I am sorry to say, amid the jeers of the bystanders, produced not by any ill-will to the culprit, or liking to either police or excise, but by the ridiculous figure the poor fellow now cut.

I returned to the inn, when I thought Erskine would be about finished. He was

just drawing to the conclusion of a not very long letter, which had cost him so much hard work that the perspiration was standing in drops on his brow.

"Well," I said, "how have you got on? Have you finished?"

"Man, Ramsay, I had rather work a hard day's work than do the like o' this again. Just you, like a good chap, fold it for me, for I aye make a mess o' such things."

I laughed, and folded up the sheet as he wished me to do. Envelopes were not common in those days with the like of us; besides the postage of a letter in an envelope was double, so they were little used at all.

"Ah, Erskine," I said, "it 'll soon come easy enough—before you have written half

a dozen, you'll get along swimmingly, never fear."

"I dinna ken; I was to write once a week or so, but that 'll hae to depend on circumstances, I'm thinking."

"Well, let's have tea, and then for the post-office; we'll be in quite good time after that."

We had tea with the landlady herself, and she relieved Erskine's mind of a great load by assuring him that his letter would be in plenty of time. As soon as it was written, the fidgets about getting it sent away took possession of him, and he became quite nervous and fearful that it would be too late after all. We were in good time for all that, and posted our letters with our own hands, at the Post-office, for the greater security and certainty. Then, having paid our bill,

which made Erskine's hair very nearly stand on end, we got a cab and went away to take possession of our new lodging.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEXT day I set out to deliver my letters of introduction—that from Miss Grahame first of all. I advised Erskine at the same time to call at the great shop in Lord Street, in those premises we had reconnoitred the previous day. We agreed to meet at a certain place, the only one we both really knew, at a fixed hour, and then went on our several ways. I knew very well, from old experience, that as most of the letters I had received from Miss Grahame were to ladies, it would not do to go early

in the day, so I waited till it should be a proper hour before I began. I found nearly all at home on whom I called, and as my intercourse with better-class people at Meadowside had somewhat polished my manners, I don't think but that I behaved myself pretty well. I was on the whole very well received, in some cases with kindness, and in all with courtesy ; and manifold were the inquiries after the "dear old creatures," "the kind creatures," "kind ladies," and so forth, I had to answer. I must say that that mode of speaking of those I esteemed so highly rather jarred on my ear, but I set it down to the difference of race and nation, and not to anything else. Everybody I saw seemed to be quite enthusiastic about them indeed, and had not the least fear but that they should easily

get their husbands, or fathers, or brothers, to take me into their employment. I began at last to think that I should have so many offers for my poor services that I should be at a loss which to accept.

The last letter I had to deliver in the upper part of the town was to a gentleman. I did not expect to find him at home when I called, but thought it as well to try. He was at home, and the servant led me upstairs to a moderate-sized handsome room—half drawing-room, half parlour, I fancied, the furniture of which was old and substantial, the carpet, at one time doubtless a very magnificent Brussels one, now much worn in many places, but yet the whole was in perfect keeping with the white-haired, reverent-looking old gentleman, and venerable gentle-like old lady

who were seated at the farther end of the room. The gentleman rose a little stiffly as I made my best bow, and presented my letter, saying it was from Miss Grahame, of Meadowside. He motioned me to a seat, and the old lady, as he opened, and, with the aid of his eye-glass, began to read the letter, said to me,

“How is my kind old friend, Miss Grahame?”

“She was very well a few days ago, ma’am. I saw her the day before I left home, and both Miss Burns and she were very well then.”

“Ah! she is a good friend, and always trying to do good ever since I knew her.”

“She is all that, ma’am—she has befriended me greatly ever since I was a boy. I owe more to the ladies of Mea-

dowside than I do to anybody but my own mother."

"I am glad to hear you say so—and poor Miss Burns, is she still pining?"

"She's not strong, I have sometimes fancied, ma'am, but she always appears cheerful and happy."

"Ah!—Well, Robert, what does our old friend say?"

"Why, a great deal that you'll like to read, and to think over; but the chief thing for the present is to recommend this young man to my notice for some kind of employment."

"Well, Robert, you must see what you can do about that; Miss Grahame is no ordinary acquaintance—and see, besides, poor Sir William Soulis adds his good word too."

Then turning to me she continued:

"Mr.—oh! Mr. Ramsay, I see; do you know Sir William Soulis too?"

"Perfectly well, ma'am—at least," I continued, feeling my face growing very hot, "as well as a boy could hope to know a gentleman like him. I have been in the habit of meeting him once a week for a good many years."

The lady smiled at my confusion and correction of myself, I fancied, as much as to say, "Very good, I like such modesty;" but it was, perhaps, only my own vanity which put that into my head.

"I need not ask where," she said.

"It was at Meadowside, ma'am, on Sabbath evenings. The ladies would always have me with them after church on the Sunday afternoons, and I generally met him there."

"Why, Robert, this is just the old story;

does it not bring back old times to you quite freshly?"

Mr. Oswald, for that was the gentleman's name, nodded and smiled. It was quite evident to me that these old Liverpool people were much better acquainted with Meadowside than I could have fancied. At this moment a carriage—a very handsome and well-appointed one, as I could see from my seat near the window—drew up at the door, and Mr. Oswald rose.

"Mr. Ramsay," he said, "I am going into town now; but do you come up here —by-the-bye, have you got lodgings yet?"

"Yes, sir, I have."

"Come up, then, to-morrow, a little—say half an hour—earlier than this—that will be better than having him call at the office, Jane. I shall see my sons in the

meantime, and they'll try if they can do anything."

I thanked him, and was rising to go away, when the old lady stopped me.

"Don't go yet, Mr. Ramsay; I wish to talk to you about my old friends."

When her husband went away in the handsome carriage, I had to give her as good an account as I could of all her old friends, Sir Willian Soulis, Miss Burns, but, above all, of her old schoolfellow, as she called Miss Grahame, and that insensibly led to a full history of myself, and all belonging to me, I fancy. I got quite confused by the kindness of Mrs. Oswald, and I have no doubt I said very many foolish things—but if so, she appeared to be pleased with them all; and when, at last, I rose to go, she bade me good morning with such a sunshiny smile on her kind

old face, that I felt as if I was parting with an old friend.

I left that house in Abercromby Square so light-hearted and joyous, that I fancied I could have done any conceivable thing. One thing I resolved I should not do, for some time, at least—I would not deliver any of the other letters till I should see how this prospect turned out. At the other houses at which I had called that day there had been much more demonstration of affection and regard for Miss Grahame; but I had penetration enough to see, after this interview, how much more the quiet regard of Mr. and Mrs. Oswald was, than all the protestations of the former, and how much greater chance there was of benefit to myself in the “Well, Robert, you must see what can be done,” than in all the flattering

promises of the others put together; and yet it was possible I might be wronging these others all the while.

I was so excited, and, at the same time, so anxious to find out who this Mr. Oswald really was, and what his business, that I went into the first respectable public-house I could find, to have a glass of ale and make inquiries.

“Mr. Oswald? What, Mr. Oswald as lives i’ the square, and drives down such a pretty pair o’ bays i’ the mornin’?”

“Yes, the very same.”

“The owd gentleman is the head o’ the biggest house in Liverpool. He has ever sae mony ships, and does more i’ that way than anybody i’ the town, I’ve heerd tell.”

“Thank you,” I said, and was moving away, when he continued,

"An' he and his lady be two o' the best folk in Liverpool i' the bargain."

"I can well believe that," I said.
"Thank you; good morning."

I got away this time. I had no desire to gossip with a publican even about the qualities of such worthy people. Besides, my hour for meeting Erskine at the post-office had come, and I did not very well know how to find my way to it. A policeman directed me, however, and I soon found that if Liverpool was long at this point, any way it was not very broad, for I got to our place of tryst very speedily.

Poor Ralph was standing kicking his heels under the portico, and looking anything but successful. He brightened up, however, amazingly when he saw me approaching, and we proceeded at once

to the place where we had dined the day before, which was quite close at hand.

"Well, Ralph, what success?" I asked.

"Oh! I couldna expect success at once, you know; but perhaps there may be a vacancy soon, and I'm to call again."

"Very good—that's always something; the ice is broken, anyhow, and you'll not find it so disagreeable to go back."

"Yes, that's very true; but I must try some other place—every other place I can think of. It'll never do to wait on a hope like that."

Alas! neither he nor I as yet knew the true meaning of those cabalistic words, "Call again," which have so frequently driven young men in such circumstances as ours to the very verge of, if not absolutely to, despair.

“And you?” he asked—“how have you succeeded, Andrew? I hope you have done better.”

“Well, I’ve had good promises, and been told to call again by nearly all I have seen; but I have seen the largest ship-owner in Liverpool, and his lady specially, and I am to go back to-morrow again at the same time. I think I’m pretty sure of success there.”

“Good luck to you, Andrew!—I hope it may be so.”

“Well, I hope so too. Now for yourself; you know we must look over the papers every day, and see if we can’t find out something for you too.”

We dined frugally, had a glass of ale a-piece, and then set off for a stroll; the time might soon come to both of us when

a knowledge of the streets and ways of Liverpool would be useful, and not so easily learned as now, when we had leisure.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is very wearisome work going over the streets of a large town, where you have no business to do, know no one, and, most depressing of all, feel yourself a mere unknown unit—a mere atom of the bustling population, for whom no one cares. I have felt this more than once in my time, and then, though I had the companionship of Ralph Erskine, and consequently could not brood so much over this feeling, I felt it keenly. I believe Ralph felt it more than I did, for there was some prospect of my obtaining employment soon, but none as

yet for him. Indeed, in our voyage in the steamer we had discussed, with all the sanguineness of youth, the period of time we might have to wait, and a fortnight at the soonest was considered by both of us as what we should think very good fortune. Now here was I, on the third day, with good hopes of immediate occupation, while poor Ralph had none, and his spirits fell proportionably; he was altogether oblivious of the fortnight's waiting we had, three or four days ago, thought so reasonable.

Our walk, therefore, at first was not a very cheerful one, but the continual stir and bustle and novelty around soon roused us again, and we began to take notice of what was going on, and to become interested in all we heard and saw. We ventured across the river, our landlady having told us about Birkenhead, and

explored that region, then but a small place, boasting only of the square, which, we were told, was the finest square in this part of England, and, better still, the work of a Scotchman. As yet neither docks, nor park, nor anything, in fact, but a few streets of private houses, with some few public-houses and little shops, had been erected, and half an hour made us acquainted with the whole place. We soon tired of it, and returned weary enough to our lodgings, glad to get rest for the time; for to people accustomed to work as we had been, this idle sort of wandering is not only most wearisome, it is also most perilous.

It may be believed that I did not fail to keep my appointment the next morning. But first I accompanied Erskine round by the newspaper office, where the publishers dis-

played the advertising columns of their paper to the public, and leaving him there to look over the list of persons wanted, I hurried off to the square to keep my engagement. I arrived in good time, and met with as kind a reception as I had done the day before, or even more so, if that were possible. Mr. Oswald, however, questioned me pretty closely as to how I had been employed hitherto, and shook his head when I told him, I fancied; but he looked brighter again, when I put into his hands the testimonial as to my character which Mr. Chapman had given me.

"I can say little about it," he said. "You will go down to the office with me, however, and my son shall decide. He is prepared to be favourable to you, for Miss Grahame's sake."

I thanked him, and asking where I should go, rose at once to take my departure, but he put up his hand and motioned me to my seat again.

"I am going down in a few minutes myself," he said; "and shall take you with me. There is no need for haste."

I stammered out something, I do not very well know what, about the honour being too great, or something of that kind; but the old couple only smiled, and Mrs. Oswald led me off into a conversation about Edinburgh, and Errol, and all the places round, with which they appeared to be fully as well acquainted as I was; and the transition being easy from the places to the people, it at last settled down on Sir William Soulis, about whom and whose habits they were very desirous to hear. Of course

I knew little, and could tell them little, even if I had been willing, which I certainly was not, unless it had been something favourable; but they always spoke of him as “poor Sir William.” Evidently they had known something of him when he was not a poor dissipated Government *employée*, but something far higher and better. All three might be about an age, and I fancied there might be something under that commiserating “poor Sir William” which could throw light on the position he now held; perhaps, also, on the formation of those habits in which he now indulged.

But at last the carriage made its appearance, and I was constrained to enter and take my place in one of the luxurious corners. Mr. Oswald still kept up the conversation as we drove smoothly along.

I do not now remember what he spoke of, for my heart beat faster and faster as we approached the centre of the town, and the place where my fate was to be decided for the time. I remember this, though, and I could hardly restrain myself from laughing aloud when, as I looked out of the carriage, I saw Ralph Erskine staring fixedly at it, and at me. He had caught sight of my face, on which his eyes were fixed with a look of bewildered astonishment, which was very comical. Poor fellow! I knew he was not at all envious, but this *rencontre* was enough to make him so, I fancied. Perhaps I judged him by myself; had he been in my place, and I in his, I might have been envious of his good fortune.

The counting-house of Messrs. Oswald and Sons was rather an old-fashioned place,

in a court which formed a short cut between two of the principal streets in the centre, or very nearly so, of the business quarter of the town. It was a very large place, and the outer office was filled with desks, at which, standing or sitting on high stools, were a number of young and middle-aged men, taking it very easy, as I thought. The desks were separated from the public by a broad counter, such as one sees in banks, on which samples of various commodities—for the firm were great merchants as well as great ship-owners—were placed as if for inspection. In the snuggest corner an old man of Mr. Oswald's own age, or nearly so, who seemed to have charge of all the rest, stood before a desk with a great ledger open before him; and in front of the counter were various per-

sons, who seemed waiting till he had leisure to speak to them, or perhaps till he had finished searching in that big book on their behalf.

Trembling all over, I yet took all this in at a glance.

“Is Mr. Robert within?” Mr. Oswald asked.

“Yes, I believe he is. How are you this morning, sir? Hope you are better this morning,” was the quick rejoinder.

“Why, yes, I think so at least, Barton,” Mr. Oswald answered smiling.

It was as clear as day that these two elderly men had grown old in company, and that Barton, the head clerk, was the friend quite as much as the servant of Mr. Oswald; and it said a great deal for the kindness of the chief of that great

house, and the affectionate feeling entertained towards him by those he employed, that, at Barton's question, every pen ceased and all bent forward with eager faces to hear Mr. Oswald's answer.

Mr. Oswald went on, however, along a wide passage lighted from the roof—for the office was a large building of only one story—telling me to follow him. On our way we passed two doors, one on either side, having “Mr. Frank Oswald” painted on the one, and “Mr. Robert” on the other. At the very end of the passage was Mr. Oswald’s own room—a large, airy apartment, airy for that part of the town at least, having a writing table in the centre, and a few chairs arranged along the walls, which were covered with great maps and charts of various countries and seas, and notably of the town of Liverpool

and the channels of the Mersey. I had no long time allowed me to examine these, even if I had cared to do so, for Mr. Oswald, who had left me for a few minutes, returned with a youngish man, very like himself in face and figure, but with perhaps a more pre-occupied and business-like air, such indeed as well became the active manager of a business like theirs.

"This is Mr. Ramsay, the young man I told you about, Robert," Mr. Oswald said; "highly recommended by our old friends. What do you say about him?"

"That depends entirely on if he will suit us, father," the young man answered with a slight bow, or rather nod, to me; "I daresay I could find room and work for him, if he can do it."

Thereupon I was questioned closely again

as to my previous training, as to my knowledge of arithmetic, and on various other points, which I need not mention here, only that I possessed a pretty competent acquaintance with the French language, which seemed both to surprise and please them. I was quite ignorant of the description of business in which they were specially engaged, but I was very willing to learn, and make myself useful in any way I could, and as willing to take any amount of salary that I could live upon, at least to begin with. I had no fear for the future in a house like that, if I could only get in.

Mr. Robert mused for a time, and then said to his father that he thought they might give me a trial, and if I was found fit for their work they would then be able to decide

what remuneration I should receive. Of course I was only too happy to agree, and with the understanding that I was to enter on my duties in the beginning of the week, I went away quite uplifted with joy—as happy as a king. I resolved to write home at once, and put them to the expense of a letter more than we had agreed upon. Surely to learn such good news was well worth the postage, however heavy it might be.

I found Erskine waiting for me at our lodgings. He had seen two or three advertisements for young men, and he wished to try his fortune by applying. I found him sitting with paper before him, and a pen in his hand, cogitating, but not having as yet made up his mind what he should say, or how he should address the people advertising. He was a decidedly

slow coach in the way of writing letters. Indeed, I fancy it was very much the case with most young men of our class in those days—it is very different now. He jumped up when I told him of my good fortune, shook my hand warmly, and wished me all manner of prosperity and success. Then, my assistance having enabled him to get his letters written, we posted them in time, and set out to enjoy ourselves for one night, to celebrate my success.

I treated him to the pit of the theatre. It was not the first by many times that I had been in such a place, though I had only gone at rare intervals, but it was entirely a novelty to my comrade, and he enjoyed it greatly. I am not sure now that it was the best way of expressing my joy, but I was then only a very young man, and pleasures of that kind were a

sort of special treat for great occasions,
and this I fancied was a great one, if ever
any was.

CHAPTER XV.

SIX months quickly passed away after I entered the service of the Messrs. Oswald. Long before that I had been admitted a full member of their staff of paid clerks. In their counting-house, as in many others, there were two or three young gentlemen who had paid large premiums, in order to become acquainted with business in the best and easiest way, who kept the salaries of the paid clerks lower than they would otherwise have been.

Ralph Erskine, after a most miserable and tedious six weeks of effort to obtain

employment, and when he was nearly reduced to his last shilling, had procured a situation in a second-rate establishment; and having to live in his employer's house, had left me long ago, and now I only saw him on Sundays, unless I called at the shop, which I sometimes did of an evening. I had removed to lodgings in a better and quieter part of the town, where I paid no more rent, though I had much better accommodation. I had not become very intimate with any of my fellow-clerks. I found that they were all more or less sporting characters, and that in respect of purse they far outstripped me. The parents of the younger portion, who were more like companions for me than the others, mostly resided in the town, and the elders were chiefly married men, with the exception of Mr.

Barton, who was a determined old bachelor, as the others said. Mr. Barton was very kind to me, and did a great deal to make me comfortable in the office, and even took me home with him two or three times, as if in compassion for my loneliness. I had been at the homes of some of my neighbours, but as yet English habits and customs were so strange to me, that I did not fall easily into their ways, and therefore did not feel at all comfortable among them, kindly as they seemed disposed towards me. It was just about this time that I fell in with a person who, though almost, as it seemed to me at first, a reprobate, not only interested me greatly, but was also to exercise no little influence both on myself personally, and on my future fortune.

I was in the habit of dining in town. In those days there was no great choice of places where this was possible, and one had to be content with the best he could easily get, and that such as would be scouted now. In the room to which I was in the habit of going daily, about midday, I, as people very speedily do who go regularly to the same place, soon had a particular seat which I regarded as my own. After a time I began to take notice of the people who frequented the room at that hour; notably of a shabby broken-down but withal gentleman-like person who invariably took his seat opposite me at the same table, and who I could not help noticing always began his dinner with a glass of whiskey and water, and finished it in the same way. While all the rest of the

frequenters of that house, I observed, if they did drink grog at all, which few of them did, however, were content with one glass, he, on the contrary, seldom confined himself to two.

After a time we got into conversation in this way. He had remarked my Scottish accent, and one day addressing me as a countryman, asked me where I came from. I said Errol, and then his face blanched for a moment, and he started as if he had received a blow. I did not appear as if I noticed it, however, and he began to speak of Errol and Edinburgh, with which places he showed himself well acquainted, and, from the way he spoke I inferred that he knew, or had known well, a great number of the higher classes there; even that Sir John of Errol who had bound me over

to keep the peace towards all His Majesty's lieges. We became more intimate from day to day, and at last I found out, as I was doing business in the office of a great produce broker, who was to sell a cargo of colonial produce for us, that this dissipated gentleman-like man was his chief accountant or book-keeper.

A considerable time passed away, during which I met with Mr. Hope every day at the usual place, and we became intimate. At last one day he invited me to come to his lodgings, to spend the evening with him; which I at once agreed to do. I felt attracted by him, and yet somehow repelled, for lax as my own notions were on some points, his were laxer still. But I was anxious to know more of him, and he was clearly a man of enlarged mind and great cultivation. Besides,

I wished to find out all I could about him, and who he could be. Very blameable of me, I confess, but I fancy my curiosity was, at the same time, very natural, for we knew all the people connected with Errol who had gone away, and certainly there was no family of the name of Hope in the old borough likely to have sent out such a man as this, so superior in most respects, and yet so great a slave, as I could guess he was, to strong liquors.

I went to his lodgings that night at the time appointed, ostensibly to take tea with him; but I soon found, at least as far as he was concerned, that tea was only a cover for the more dangerous beverage. During all these past months I had been specially careful of myself, and had subdued the desire, I fancied,

that had for a short time been so rampant, and I did not feel the least inclination to depart from my watchfulness that night. But of what use are resolutions with a person of puerile or excitable nature, if he runs headlong into temptation? The best resolutions are but as the morning clouds or the early dew, which disappear at once when the temptation comes. We may plan, and scheme, and purpose that we shall not fall; but people of such a temperament, when the trial comes, find too surely that

“The best laid schemes o’ mice and men
Gang aft agae.”

Mr. Hope lived in a much better style than I could have fancied from his appearance or his habits. He occupied the first floor of a good house in a good quarter of the town; and the room into

which I was shown was a handsome one, the furniture good, and, altogether, the place had a much better look than one usually finds in a lodging-house. In one corner there was a goodly collection of books, at least they seemed so to me, and on a table near one of the windows stood an open desk, with papers scattered about, partly written, partly printed, the latter in long strips, like the yards of ballads I had seen people selling about the streets. I could make nothing of these then, though afterwards I learned all about these plagues of an author's life—proof-sheets. There were one or two pictures on the walls, which gave the room a clothed appearance; and the apartment, on the whole, looked more like a home than any room I had ever seen in a lodging-house, and, indeed, long as I lived

in lodgings myself, I never could discover another like it.

Hope and I sat talking of indifferent things for a long time; he appeared to have been drinking a good deal throughout the day, but was quite steady and rational. After tea, having made me take a seat on the other side of the fire, while he drew in a small table between us, on which were placed glasses and decanters, from which we helped ourselves, Hope began to speak once more of our own country. He was in that state when no one could say that he was tipsy, nor yet affirm that he was sober either. He was inclined to talk more than usual. Hitherto he had asked me questions, now, on the contrary, he told me that when a boy he had been a boarder and scholar at Errol School,

though he belonged to Edinburgh, and therefore knew the place well. He had left Scotland in disgust many years before to go to the West Indies, but had never got further than Liverpool; and since then had never heard of any of his old friends but in the most indirect way, and therefore they could not have the most distant idea of where he was, or, indeed, whether he was still in the land of the living.

“But do you not desire to know, Mr. Hope?” I ventured to ask; “and don’t you wish them to hear some tidings of yourself?”

“No, no, I don’t. Even suppose I were to meet any of them, they would never recognize me, I feel quite sure of that.”

He seemed to be overpowered by that

thought, and I could see a change come over his face, though it was partly hidden from me, as if he could have wept; for the wish to be hidden from people we love may exist with a strong desire to be remembered kindly by them, and the idea that you could by any possibility pass unnoticed must always be painful. When he became more composed, he asked how it happened that I had come to Liverpool, and how I had succeeded in getting into such employment, the best office in the town, he said.

I briefly told him why I had come, and how I had been introduced to the Oswalds. I was quite unprepared for what took place, for I never saw such a change come over a man in my life as came over Mr. Hope then. He seemed for a few seconds as if he had taken a

fit, and, grasping his neckcloth, loosed it with desperate haste. Then, partially recovering himself as I rose in great alarm to seek for help, he motioned me to my seat again, and appeared all at once to have become quite sober.

Then he asked me—after a slight apology for his interruption of my story—to repeat what I had said; and again, as the ladies of Meadowside were mentioned, though it was clear he tried very hard to resist it, the same emotion, though in a lesser degree, seemed to cross his countenance.

Having fortified himself with a glass of undiluted spirits, almost the only time I ever saw him do so, he began to question me closely about the ladies, especially, I thought, about Miss Burns. I was by this time becoming greatly excited myself. His extreme emotion, and the

fumes of the toddy combined, had a very powerful effect upon me, and he had little difficulty, I fear, in learning all I knew.

I never saw a man more interested in anything than he was in even the most minute details of my intercourse with the ladies at Meadowside, and about Sir William Soulis. He, like the Oswalds, also said "poor," but not "Sir;" it was "poor William," poor something else being joined therewith, which I could not catch. I had to tell him how the ladies lived, how they looked, and what they did. He was wonderfully interested and concerned to hear of the look of settled sorrow and care which seemed ever to cloud Miss Burns's beautiful face; and actually he sighed, and turned away his head, perhaps to wipe away a tear, as I dwelt upon the fact.

When he had extracted all the information he could from me, he threw some light on the agitation and emotion I had noticed. He said that long ago, when he was a boy, he had known the ladies and Sir William well, but that he had not met with one who knew them so well as I did for many, many years. He said he knew that they were living, but that was all. Once he had liked them well, and it had been a sad hour to him, and a bitter, bitter parting, when he left Edinburgh and all his old friends; but all that was over now, and, *carpe diem*, nothing else remained but to enjoy the time, and to be jolly when we could. And, with the sudden transition common enough to tipsy men, he burst out with a song, "Taste life's glad moments," which he sang very well, I thought, so

far as I could then judge, and immediately plunged once more into hard drinking again.

It was very late that night before I reached my lodgings. Fortunately I could let myself in, for I should have been mortally ashamed the next day had I thought that either my landlady or her servant had seen me in the state I was in.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAVING gone home as I have said, it may well be believed that I awoke by no means in the best possible trim for business the next morning, what with headache, and nausea, and disinclination to do anything. So ill did I feel, in fact, that I once thought I would not go to the counting-house at all; but then I feared that that might procure me a visit from some of the clerks, perhaps from Mr. Barton himself, and I was by no means wishful for that in the circumstances. I could not eat any breakfast,

but that was of little consequence—I could do very well without breakfast for one day, I fancied; whereas I had a sense of guiltiness, a feeling of ill-desert, which I could not shake off. What was the loss of breakfast compared with that? I fancied every one, even those people I met in the streets, who knew nothing about me, must know that I had been tipsy, against my own fixed purpose, too, the overnight. In the office it would be still worse, while all the time no one, most probably, thought anything, or cared anything, about how it had been with me; but

"Conscience makes cowards of us all,"

and so it did with me that day.

Yet this did not prevent me from entering a public-house on my way down, and having a glass of brandy and soda-

water—a sure remedy, as I had read and heard repeatedly, for persons in my state. It is true by this time my nervous system was steadied a little, and I was able to take my place as usual, though looking so ill that all my neighbours remarked it, and Mr. Barton even suggested that I had better go home. However, there was outdoor work in my department to be done, and I set out to do it. That would at least remove me from the scrutiny of my fellow-clerks for the day, and, being in the open air, might restore me; anyway, it would be better than being in the office.

I got myself brought into something like working order by and bye, but only by feeding the fire which was still within me. However, I gained thereby steadiness, and some degree of composure, and then the scene

of the previous night came back into my mind bit by bit, and afforded me ample materials for thought, as well as for regret. Who could this Mr. Hope be, who knew so well all about Errol and Edinburgh, who had been so intimate, at one time, with my own dear friends, and who called the old baronet “poor William,” I racked my brain to discover. I ran over in my mind all the people I had ever heard of who had disappeared within public cognizance. There were very many of whom public rumour spoke loudly, for we Scotchmen are an adventurous race, though, at the same time, generally an affectionate one. Then I thought over the names of those of good station who had

“Left their country for their country’s good;” but I was not so well acquainted with persons in that category. I had heard of

some defaulters, certainly, who had disappeared—notably of one who had been accused, it was maintained by many, falsely, a man of family, too, who would have been hanged if he had stayed, though many people were persuaded of his innocence. I had been told that he had never been heard of from the time of his disappearance, and that now it was confidently believed that he was dead. Somehow I had always connected in my own mind Miss Burns's melancholy sadness with this lost person. It was with a start that the idea flashed into my mind that perhaps this Mr. Hope was the man. I had never heard the name mentioned. It was only from some half hints of old Jenny the servant that I had learned anything of the story, and, however curious I might have been about it, I had never liked to inquire of her more particularly.

I got through that day pretty well, considering everything, but, alas! it was only the prelude to many more days like it. I always managed to do my work correctly, but it soon became no longer work in which I took pleasure, and was anxious to excel in, that I might please my employers, but it became mere mechanical labour, which I was glad to get done in any way that would pass. It happened speedily, moreover, that my Sundays were seldom passed in church, as had been the case before. Sometimes I lay in bed most of the day, sometimes I wandered about the streets and environs of the town, or went across to Cheshire. My salary had been raised, but I had not risen in my personal habits with it. I was sinking fast, becoming somewhat slovenly and careless in my dress, while my purse was nearly always at a low

ebb. In fact, it would have appeared to many, indeed, as if I had taken the shabby genteel style of Mr. Hope as the pattern which I was to follow, and were trying to bring myself down as rapidly as possible to the same dissipated look with him. People judge by the appearance naturally, they little guessed the mind Hope's shabby dress and dissipated habits concealed. We were very frequently together, and however great the predisposition was in myself to this dreadful vice, there can be little doubt that he was the proximate cause of my falling into the deep so far as I did. Ralph Erskine warned me, entreated me to forbear. He came to see me every Sunday, at first accompanied me in my walks, and did not scruple nor hesitate to take part in the moderate refreshment to which, for a long time,

we limited ourselves. But while I was becoming every week more wild and reckless, he was becoming more thoughtful and earnest, and at last would no longer join me in my folly.

Mr. Hope did not positively encourage me to drink after the first twice or thrice, but indirectly he did, and I, instead of taking warning by his example, seemed rather to imitate than to avoid the excesses which I felt were hurting me. I never could get at his previous history further than he had briefly told me on the first occasion I had been at his rooms. Indeed, to find out more about him was the salve I applied to my conscience when I went to see him, whereas it was a desire for his company, and the indulgence in liquor, which was without doubt the chief reason. But he was so much older than I,

that, however familiar the footing on which we stood, I hardly liked to ask him any questions. Still, from our frequent conversations, my convictions grew stronger every day that there had been some intimate friendship existing between him, unworthy as he now seemed, and my old friends in Meadowside; and I speculated, could it be for this man that Miss Burns had so long mourned? If so, he surely could never have been worthy of her, or some mighty change had come to pass in him since then. Well might she have mourned, if he had ever been dear to her, could she see the wreck he had become now.

One night, when we were together, I casually said that I had had a letter from Meadowside, which I must go home to answer. He started almost as violently as he had done the first time I saw

him and spoke to him of the ladies, and nothing would serve him but that he should see the letter. As there was nothing in it but commonplaces, I put it into his hand. It so happened that it had been written by Miss Burns, in her aunt's name and her own, and was filled with good counsels, and a little gentle reproach for forgetting my old friends. I watched him narrowly, and, fully on his guard as I saw he was, he could not altogether conceal his emotion, and at last he fairly broke down as he read the letter. There was not a word in the letter itself to cause excitement; it was as quiet as a letter could well be, but it affected the strong man as if he had been a little child; and then followed murmured words, none of which I could catch, except those fatal ones, two or three times repeated, “Too late!—too late!”

By this emotion I was greatly confirmed in the certainty of the idea I had been speculating on, and as I took back the letter I had the hardihood to say that, as he appeared once to have known, and still to feel a deep interest in these ladies, perhaps I had better tell them I had found an old friend of theirs when I answered this letter.

"Not for worlds!" was his answer; "they think me dead, as do all my friends —far better they should think so than know me as I am; it is too late now—too late!"

There was a pathos and agony in the expression so repeated—a feeling that he was indeed a wreck, which affected me greatly. But the qualm passed away, or, rather, he flew to the bottle to drive it off, and when I left he seemed on the fair

way of being worse than he had been for a long time. Ah! one may try to drive away thought, to banish unpleasant reflections, to drown feelings which wound and grieve, in such a way as that in which poor Hope tried to do it, but they will come back and, perchance, with all the greater sting for their enforced banishment.

During all this time I was not only falling in my own self-respect, but also in that of Mr. Barton and my fellow-clerks. He had begun to suspect the cause, and had warned me very kindly of the certain consequences of such a life—very kindly, there is no doubt of that, but very clearly, so that I saw my situation trembling in the balance, and that greater prudence and circumspection were necessary. But what was the effect of these warnings upon me?—Why, that the moment I could

get out of the office I hastened to the fatal cup again. My prudence and circumspection were only called into play for the purpose of baffling all in the office, and became merely a low species of cunning, which, if only I was not found out, considered itself the highest wisdom. For down, down I was daily falling, and unless some power higher than myself intervened, unless I was plucked out of this mire, the chances were that I should sink so low as to be utterly past recovery. It was a dreadful time, dreadful in every way, from which I was to be roughly awoke, thanks be to God !

CHAPTER XVII.

ONE's progress downward is always amazingly rapid. Every step of our way up-hill must be strenuously struggled for, and it requires often a stout heart and a steadfast purpose merely to hold our own, even though we make no advance; but downward each successive step we go the faster, until, unless the Lord interposes, we rush into ruin headlong. It was very much so with me—advice, warnings, even threats were all unavailing for the time. Not that I neglected my work, but that I did it in a careless and slovenly manner. I never was

absent from my place in the office on account of my dissipation, but I often went there very unfit for the duties I had to perform, and even my prospects for the future were lost sight of in my desire for present excitement. I should have been discharged with ignominy, I feel sure, and my fellow-clerks would have been glad to get rid of me, I have little doubt, had it not been that I was stricken by the hand of God; for though the fever of the brain which came upon me could be traced clearly enough to natural causes, and was produced by the high state of artificial excitement in which I had been living, I recognized it none the less as a punishment from His hand, and to me truly a most merciful one it was.

I remember nothing whatever about that period but certain dim shadowy visions.

I believe I was for many days unconscious of what was passing around me, and during most of the time was in such a state of delirium that strong men had to be got to keep me in bed. But I well remember, when I came to myself again, how weak I was, and how much astonished at my weakness. I could not for a long time, for days indeed, fully realize what had happened, and I lay there at first as much puzzled and perplexed as one could well be, as to what had come over me.

It was clear daylight when I came to myself again, and as I lay wondering what was the matter, I heard the clock strike the hour at which I should have been in the counting-house; and having, as I felt persuaded, never failed before, I made an attempt to get up, but I

soon found that I could not raise my head from the pillow, far less get out of bed. The slight stir and rustle caused by my efforts to get up brought to my bedside one I fancied then hundreds of miles away, and the effort to rise, together with the sight of her who looked down upon me with such loving compassion in her eyes, was too much for my weakened frame, and I fainted away.

I suppose I must have remained in this faint so long as to terrify all about me, for when my senses returned, the doctor, my mother, my landlady, and some one else I could not recognize, were standing about the bed. I was too weak to speak at first, and when by and by I would have done so, they prevented me; but I heard the doctor say that the danger was past, and that this syncope

was caused by some sudden surprise, joined to my great weakness, and they were not to be alarmed about it. He gave me a draught of some kind immediately, and I fell over into a deep sleep, which, so far as I know, lasted till the evening.

When I again awoke there was only a subdued light in the room, the shades of evening were closing fast, and but for the light of the candle on a table in the middle of the chamber I could not have discerned anything. At that table my mother was seated; she was alone, and appeared to be reading, so far as I could make out. I did not for a long time disturb her by the least motion. I lay still and watched her, and tried to collect my thoughts, and to discover what was wrong with me—what had happened

to me, that I should be lying here so helpless, and she so far from home attending on me. I recognized my own lodgings, and knew well I must still be in Liverpool, otherwise the sight of my mother might have made me fancy that by some strange means I had been carried home. I thought at first that I must have met with some dreadful accident, and I tried to pass my hands over my body and limbs under the bed-clothes to discover if any of them had been broken. Every bone in my body might have been shattered to pieces for aught I could tell, for my arms were powerless, and my hands, as if weighted with lead, were perfectly helpless, and unable to execute my will. But though I became convinced very shortly there was nothing wrong with my limbs, I yet remained quite

at a loss to find out what was wrong. At last some more energetic movement than any previous one I had made caused my mother to rise and come to the bedside.

"What is the matter with me, mother?"

I was perfectly horrified to hear the sound of my own voice, thin, shrill, and weak as that of a child.

"Whisht, my man, ye maunna speak, ye maun keep perfectly quiet or else ye'll no get better; by and by ye'll hear a' about it. Only this I'll tell you, that you've been as near death, Steenie, my dear son, as a man can be and yet live."

"And how long have I been ill, mother?"

"I've been here very near on to a

fortnight, and ye were very ill when I was sent for. But ye maun be quiet, Steenie, my man—I'll no say another word to you just now. Take your medicine like a man, and maybe, if the Lord will, ye'll sune be better now."

I took the medicine she poured out for me; whether it was a sleeping draught or not I cannot tell—any way, it did not cause me to sleep. I lay there wide awake, looking at my mother. I did not wonder so much at seeing her there, after the first surprise was past. What, indeed, was this one extra element where the whole was past my comprehension, when I could not account for a single circumstance? I felt no inclination to sleep, but I lay quite still, unwilling to disturb my mother.

I had lain thus quietly for a considerable time, when I heard a rustling sound at the door of the room, and some one entered. For a long time the person, whoever it was, kept in the shadow, and I was on the rack in my anxiety to discover who it might be. All this time a whispering conversation was going on, of which I could not hear a word, but fancied naturally that it concerned myself, from the glances my mother frequently cast towards the bed. I wondered she did not see that I was awake all the time, for I was staring open-eyed at her. At last the lady who had been speaking to my mother came fully into the light, and I discovered that it was that dear old lady, Mrs. Oswald, who, for the sake of Miss Grahame, and the love of Christ above all, had come to see me, not only this once, but

two or three times a day throughout my illness. After awhile she approached the bed, and I shut my eyes, to conceal the tears swelling under my eyelids, perhaps. Surely, surely, I had not deserved such kindness and attention as this?

In the morning I awoke, after a long refreshing sleep, with feelings which I cannot describe, which only those who have been on the verge of the valley of the shadow of death can understand. I knew, only imperfectly, that such had been the case with me; but that morning I felt it, was sure of it—I felt in my whole system, so to speak, that I must have had the narrowest possible escape for my life, and was quite sensible now that I was as helpless as an infant. Yet there was a delicious feeling of bodily comfort about me, too, and a desire

for life such as I had never experienced before. I was not yet permitted to speak—even to ask questions was forbidden; indeed, I did not feel very able. I could take some food, however, and that was so far satisfactory.

After my mother had tenderly bathed my face, and smoothed my pillow, she sat down beside me, and asked if she should read to me. I said I would rather she would tell me all about this illness—how it had come on, and where, and when. She shook her head, and said there would be time enough for that by-and-by. She told me, however, that a gentleman, shabby and dissipated-looking, but yet a gentleman, she was sure, had called morning and evening, in great distress apparently, who when I was given up as lost, and

death alone was looked forward to as the finis of my illness, had accused himself bitterly to her as the cause of it.

Though I was not to be permitted to speak, my mother was curious about this person, and anxious to hear who he could be, and, therefore, would allow me to answer that one question. I guessed it must have been Hope, and I asked in return did she ever hear of anybody in whom Miss Burns had been much interested having had to leave Edinburgh from some cause, perhaps not one of the most meritorious.

She had heard of a brother of Sir William Soulis, who had fled, having been accused of forgery on the bank with which he was connected, but that had been disproved. The poor fellow, however, had never been heard of since he left

Scotland, so she had been told by Miss Elspeth Ramsay and others. I then, in the best way I could, told her I was convinced that this Mr. Hope, who had called on me, who had helped to lead me astray, who was himself such a wreck, morally and physically, and who had said it was “too late—too late!” in such a tone of agony, was, so far as I could guess, no other than that very individual who had fled from Edinburgh, and saddened and overclouded all Miss Burns’s life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONCE on the fair way, I recovered rapidly; I had youth and a good constitution on my side—broken somewhat, it is true, by the life I had been living for the last two years, but still really sound and good. It was not very long before I was able to be up again for part of the day, and, as might be expected, I was most anxious to know all about my illness—how I was seized, and where, and when, and how my mother had come to Liverpool.

During these latter days, I had been silently reviewing my life and conduct,

not only since I had come to Liverpool, but also before I left Edinburgh, and, so far as I could, strictly examining myself. It was a woful picture to look back upon—a black retrospect, which made me shudder then, and makes me shudder now as I write. What had this vice, of which I had been the too willing slave, not caused me to do? It had not made me dishonest, so far as tampering with other people's money or goods was concerned, but it had brought me to the very verge of dishonesty, and perhaps this fever was a providential interposition to save me from the dishonest act. But it had made me stoop to meannesses of which I never could have conceived myself capable in old times. It had made me forgetful of my parents, oblivious of my friends. I did not, even at my worst times, forget

sweet Mary Leslie, but when the remembrance of her came into my mind,

“The point of foeman’s lance
Had given a milder pang ;”

for I felt how unworthy I, in my degraded and vicious indulgence, was of her in her upright and spotless purity. Hence I had often flown to the bottle for a relief, however transient, to my feelings and my cares. My cherished vice had therefore very nearly made me a wreck, and a little longer indulgence in it at that time might—most probably would—have sunk me helplessly in the mire.

When I was so far strong again, my mother told me the whole story of how this dreadful illness had come upon me, as it had been told to her. The last thing I clearly remembered was having spent the evening in Mr. Hope’s lodgings,

and, more indistinctly, of having gone down to the office; then all was blank, till I awoke and found my mother watching by my bedside. It was thus her story ran:

“ You see, Steenie, you had gone to the office one morning,” she said, “ in a state of great excitement—so great that Mr. Barton, after a while, could not let it pass unchecked. It seems, also, that, when one of the older clerks reproved you for some mistake you had made, you answered him fractiously, and even lifted your hand to strike him—my puir laddie, ye must have been sair left to yoursel’ then. But Mr. Barton saw your action and heard your words, and he told you at once to go home; he could permit no such conduct to pass unreproved, and you werena to come back till he had

seen what Mr. Oswald thought of such conduct. Mr. Barton himself told me, Steenie, that you looked bewildered and surprised, and that, to the great alarm of them all, you fell back in a fit, striking your head, my puir bairn, on a sharp corner and cutting it severely."

I put up my hand to my head as my mother told me that, and found, what I had not noticed before, various straps of plaster across the back part of the head, covering the wound. I need not say that my head had been shaved long ago.

"When they saw that, Steenie," my mother continued, "Mr. Barton sent for the nearest surgeon, who brought you to life after a long time, and then pronounced you to be in a high fever, and advised that you should be sent either

to the infirmary or home. Neither good Mr. Barton nor Mr. Oswald liked the notion of the infirmary; indeed he told me that they were all against it in the office. So Mr. Barton, God bless him, brought you home here in a cab, and had every attention paid to you. Mrs. Oswald herself, dear lady, came very frequently to see you, Steenie, at the first, till I came through. And then, as soon as the most eminent doctor in the town had stated what the disease was, Mr. Oswald sent off one of the clerks direct to Miss Grahame in Edinburgh, and she, as kind as she has ever been, came out to me, and got me sent off that very same night in the mail, under the charge of the young man who had come down. A fine, kindly lad he was, too, Steenie, and spoke very feelingly about you."

Of the events that had happened in the counting-house that day I had a dim, hazy remembrance, now that my mother mentioned them, but after that came the blank. It seemed, as I learned further, that I was so violent, especially at night, for a considerable time, that they required to have strong men to watch me, to keep me in bed; and that the warehouse-men, and other strong fellows in the employment of the house, had volunteered, and kept watch two by two, till the violent fit had passed away, and the reaction of complete prostration had set in. Even after my mother came, Mr. Barton himself had sat beside me on more than one night, to allow her to get some rest. All in the office, indeed, and connected with the firm, from Mr. Oswald downwards, had been most kind and attentive.

My mother could not help speaking frequently of the apparent agony of Hope, and his accusation of himself as my destroyer; and her pity for him was strongly expressed—for she did not, after what I had told her, know that he was Miss Burns's old lover—that he, the descendant of a family almost noble, and far more ancient and famous than the majority of ennobled houses, should have sunk to such a condition as that in which he then seemed to be.

The knowledge thus communicated to me, of the care, kindness, and thoughtful attention of the members of the firm, and of my fellow-clerks, did not mitigate the feelings of self-condemnation, which before were strong and keen enough. My feelings were deepened rather than lessened, and the shame I felt for my past conduct

greatly increased. What had I ever done to deserve all this kindness? Had I been cast out like a dog, it would, indeed, have shown inhumanity on the part of those who did it, but it would only have been what I deserved richly. And instead of doing that, they had, all of them, been heaping kindnesses upon me.

My mother's eyes were filled with tears, which she quietly wiped away, as she told me all these things, and her voice quivered a "God bless them," when she spoke of Mr. and Mrs. Oswald, and Mr. Barton; for it seemed had I been their nearest kin they could not have been kinder. At first, when I was brought home to all appearance more dead than alive, my landlady, terrified lest I, a stranger, should die in her house, wished to have me sent to the hospital at once;

and only by Mr. Barton's exercising his authority in a decided way, and the frequent visits which the dear old lady, whom everybody knew as the great merchant's wife, paid me, and the anxiety she manifested about me, was she at length reconciled.

Many a vow I vowed during the first days of my convalescence—many a resolution I formed as to my future conduct. I laid down a rule to be steadfastly adhered to, for what of life God might yet spare to me, and with the determination that no power on earth should make me break it. My vow and purpose was simply this, that, as I did not seem to have as strong a brain as the majority of the people around me with whom I associated, I should, as an habitual principle, shun drink in every form. I saw then

clearly that it was better to be accounted singular—better far to be laughed at—I fully expected that I should be—than again peril both soul and body, as I had done so rashly. I was quite conscious of my weakness thus far, that, if I once began to drink again, I should in all probability go headlong to destruction. In the one way I should be safe, in the other I was putting in motion a power which might enslave me for life, if it did not destroy me. By the blessing of God, I have been able to keep my vow, and to abide by my resolution to this day.

Neither did I expect that I should be able to get rid of all the consequences of my past misconduct at once. Many people seem to think that as soon as they are out of the mire it should be so. I did not. I was quite aware that it would

take a long time—to specify only one thing—before I could regain the full confidence of my employers, or Mr. Barton, again. For long there would of necessity be doubts about me, and I made up my mind—and it is not an easy thing for one in such a case, with such fore-shadowings of the future, to do so—that I should be narrowly watched, and my conduct and actions would be closely scrutinized, and that it would require all my care, all my diligence, and all my efforts to win back the position I had once held. I was prepared for all this; and, however hard it would be, had made up my mind to bear it. To a person of my nervous and excitable temperament, it was more hard to bear than it would have been to one more phlegmatic. The temperament through which I was more easily

led astray, and more sensitively alive to the consequences of evil doing, must pay the penalty, however acute the suffering might be.

CHAPTER XIX.

I FELT anxious to see Hope. I could not bear the thought that he should accuse himself so bitterly of having led me astray, when I felt convinced in my own mind that I myself deserved the blame. I said to my mother that I should like to see him, now that I was so far recovered. She looked very doubtful for a while—she was clearly not at all sure that he was a suitable person to be admitted to see me in the weak state I still was in. However, I said that there would be nothing to excite

me, I only wished to speak to him soberly and quietly—whether he might take what I had to tell him soberly and quietly, was quite a different matter; I very much feared he would not, but yet resolved to try.

Mr. Hope called that night, and was brought upstairs to see me. He looked even more dissipated than ever, I fancied, though he was less tipsified than was usual with him when the day's work was done. My mother left us to ourselves, and then he began to accuse and blame himself for having led me so far astray, and being the cause of the trouble I had suffered. As gently as I could, I told him that neither I nor my friends blamed him, that I knew right well there was no one to blame but myself. He was evidently pleased to hear that, though

he still pleaded guilty. I turned the conversation away from that as naturally as I could, and said I had an Edinburgh story to tell him, which would perhaps interest him who had known the ancient city and its people long ago, when the affair must have happened. I then began to tell him of the poor misused young gentleman who had fled, leaving behind him kind and loving friends, with that terrible accusation of forgery hanging over his head, while all the time he knew his own innocence. I told him how the poor fellow had never been heard of since then, and how those faithful hearts had never all along doubted of his entire innocence; how they believed that he was still alive, and had never ceased to mourn and pray for him. Now, I said, all had been made clear—the real

forger, now an old man, had been discovered, and the guilt brought home to, and confessed by him; and the falsely-accused, so long ago outlawed, and put to the horn, was now clearly justified, the outlawry reversed, and he might return to his kindred and friends with an unblemished name, and sure of a joyous welcome from all.

Mr. Hope sat looking at me with a fixed gaze, not the stupid stare of besottedness which I had seen once on his face, but with the fixed attention of one eager to hear the whole without losing one word. When I had finished, I appealed to him, was it not a moving story? He only gave a deep sigh, or rather groan; murmured something which seemed to me to be those fatal words, "Too late, too late," which I had heard

him utter in such agonised tones before ; then took his hat, and bidding me a hasty good-bye, hurried away. I was not greatly surprised, I confess. Had I been in his circumstances, I should have liked to commune with my own spirit—for I had not the faintest doubt now that he was the man. What I feared most was that he would rush into fresh and deeper dissipations, to drive away the painful feelings which this unlooked-for turn of events, when joined to the state to which he had reduced himself, was sure to originate. I feared that. It would be a triumph of no little worth to save such a nature, which misfortune and stimulants, taken in large quantities to mitigate its pangs, had debased so greatly. Here was I, myself as low as I could almost sink, only slowly recovering from the effects of vicious in-

dulgence in drink, my resolutions of amendment as yet untried, unproved, thinking I could be Mentor to a man of nearly twice my age. Truly my presumption was great, but for all that I determined to combat his doctrine of "too late," with what arguments I could, when next I saw him.

I had promised not to become excited, but in spite of myself I did become very much excited indeed; and when my mother came back, after Hope had left me, she found me fevered a good deal, and though not positively alarmed, she for a long time was not at all easy about me, and said she would permit me to see nobody till I was quite better—she would take care always to be with me till then.

The only persons I saw for some time to

come, therefore, were Mr. Barton, and some others of my fellow-clerks from the office, and Ralph Erskine. Honest Ralph, whom I have lost sight of far too long, he had been nearly broken-hearted during the dangerous period of my illness, poor fellow, and had, without fail, made a run up to see how I was, after the shop shut at night. Then, on the Sundays, the good fellow used to come and sit with me for hours, to my mother's great relief, for he was one of our own people, so to speak, and she had known him long, and would rather leave me with him by my side than with any one else, so prejudiced was she in favour of her own country. Mr. Barton was a regular visitor. I believe he secretly blamed himself for having spoken to me that fateful morning too harshly. I knew better than that; I knew and felt

that he had only done his duty, and that this terrible fever, which had brought me to the gates of death, was of my own causing, and, in my then state of repentance and humility, I frankly acknowledged the entire justice of his censure, and never thought of it as harshness. Indeed, when I thought quietly over the life I had been leading for the last few years, I could not but wonder at the forbearance which had been shown to me. I was conscious of having frequently gone to business when I fancied every one must have noticed how utterly unfit I was to perform it satisfactorily, and yet I had never been openly checked till just at the end.

After a time the doctor advised that I should go to the country for a time. The weather was fine, and Mr. Oswald, who could be very despotic when he pleased, de-

cided that I should go home until I was quite strong again. I was very much pleased with the idea, very much so indeed, but for the fear that my situation might be filled up before I could come back. Mr. Barton, however, in one of his visits, set my mind at ease in that respect, and nothing remained but that my mother and I should get home as speedily as possible.

As soon as my limbs would carry me, my mother and I used to take a walk in the finest part of the day. The doctor had a great horror of easterly winds, and however warm the day might be, and pleasant the weather otherwise, he would not permit me to go out if it was from that direction. He was altogether a very quaint, kindly man, of the old school, who had received his education at the

Edinburgh University, and had a great admiration for the people of Scotland. Mrs. Oswald had sent him to me, as soon as she knew of my illness, and he had attended me zealously and faithfully throughout it all. I can never forget his attention and kindness; he seemed to have imbibed the spirit of my patroness, whose attendant he had been for many years, and he did all he could for me—first in the way of medical care and attention, when I needed it most; and when I was so far recovered, by giving me sound Christian advice and encouragement. From him I found that the true cause of my fever was well known.

My mother and I went out, as I have said, every day, during the short interval which intervened between the time of resolving to go home and the time when

the doctor would permit us to leave. My lodgings were near the outskirts of the town—then greatly more circumscribed than it is now—so that we could easily get out of the region of the houses and the close atmosphere. The children used to cluster round us with amazed looks, at seeing me so helpless, leaning on the arm of her that nature seemed to tell I should support. Then, on the faces of the elder ones, more particularly the girls, I could often trace a look of pity and commiseration, as they noted my weary gait, and my wan, spent face. Poor things, perhaps some of them had already learned part of the mysteries of life, and become acquainted, in the close courts and cellar houses which then disgraced the town of Liverpool, with the ravages of fevers, and the aspect of those who had passed

through the fiery ordeal. By these walks I gradually became so much stronger, that the doctor at last gave us his permission to go away; and nothing further remained to be done but to go down to the office, which I was desired to do, and then to bid good-bye to Hope and Ralph Erskine, and go away.

Leaving my mother, therefore, getting all things ready for our departure the following day, I took a cab, and went down to the office. In the outer office all my old neighbours were singularly kind. Had I been a sufferer by some calamity which had come upon me in the discharge of my duties, or in undertaking some hazardous service for their benefit, they could hardly have been kinder. My conscience smote me with renewed pangs as one after another the clerks came forward to shake hands,

and to congratulate me on my recovery. How little had I deserved anything like this—at least, latterly. I had brought this illness upon myself, humanly speaking, unwittingly, but no less wilfully; and when under the false stimulus of strong drink, how often had I been rude, and petulant, and overbearing—how often, as I now fancied, decidedly insolent to them all; and yet now, from Mr. Barton downward, they all seemed so glad to see me again, and to sympathise with me in my past sufferings! I felt my eyes fill with tears, for I was yet very weak, and my purpose of a new life greatly strengthened by these old comrades thus “heaping coals of fire upon my head.”

My reception by the members of the firm was quite of the same character. One might have thought that in that house

masters and servants alike had taken as their motto those gracious words of the Lord, "There is more joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance."

Mr. Frank Oswald seldom took much part in the public business of the office, unless in the absence of his brother Robert; but that day both of them were in their father's room when I entered it; they shook hands with me, and hoped I would soon be quite strong, though it was with grave and serious faces, as if, so I fancied, though they were willing to try and forgive the sinner, they desired to protest against the sin, and to show, moreover, that they were acquainted with mine.

When they had left the room Mr. Oswald himself began to speak gently and

seriously to me. He told me what he had heard of my previous life and habits ; and when I confessed to the truth, he very gravely, but very gently, too, set before me the certain consequences of a continuance in such a course, the certain ruin that must follow—ruin in every way, both here and hereafter. Mr. Oswald did not lecture nor preach at me—I fear me much that the best counsels are often ineffective just because they take that form, and thereby rouse all the innate pride of one's nature to resistance—but in a few simple sentences, which had a weight with me far greater than that of a score of sermons, he warned and counselled me. Then, when he had done, seeing me greatly affected, he began to speak cheerfully and hopefully of the future, and of how soon I should grow strong again in the pure air of Errol. I

could not answer him for a long time—indeed, all I could say was only a few broken words of thanks, and then I had to leave the room. Mr. Barton stopped me as I was going out, and put into my hand a sealed letter, which I was to open when at home, and so I went away. Perhaps nothing could have better tended to change the current of my feelings than this little bit of mystery ; at any rate, it greatly assisted in bringing that about, for while I speculated on what this letter might contain, I soon began, half in wonder, half in alarm, to think of it alone.

I had discharged the cab before I entered the office, and I now went painfully to my old dining-room to see Mr. Hope, that I might bid him good-bye. After I had waited a little he came in.

I had not seen him since he had left me so abruptly, and I was greatly shocked to see him now. He did not seem to have been drinking either, at least not that morning ; but there was a careworn and pain-stricken look in his face that I was sorry to see, and furrows on his brow which were not there in his devil-me-care days. I had expected that the story I had told him would have lightened his mind, in part at least, of a heavy load ; but the reverse seemed to have been the case. I was too young, and too inexperienced in the ways of life and in the laws of mind, to know that the removal of that fatal accusation, and the reversal of the outlawry, while it rendered his return—always supposing he was the person, of which I had no doubt whatever—to Edinburgh and to his friends

once more possible, might only have increased his mental torture, for it had come, as he pathetically said, “too late—too late.” What a half score of years ago would have been hailed as the greatest earthly blessing, had now, to the unhappy man, become his punishment; the thing most desired all his life had reached him when he dared not use it. How could he go back to that city, and to those dear ones whom he had left long years ago a gay, gallant lad, now changed, as he felt himself to be, to a broken man and an habitual drinker? No, it was impossible; better remain here unknown, uncared for, amid the seething thousands of Liverpool—better die here unnoticed and unthought of than bring shame and disgrace upon his friends, and anguish bitterer than his death could be, to

one far dearer to him than all others.

I told him briefly why I had come ; that I was to go away the next day to Scotland for a week or two, to recruit my strength, and that I did not like to go without having seen him. He looked at me in an eager and excited way as I spoke, and thanked me. I thought two or three times he was about to speak freely, but as often he checked himself. He evidently would not commit himself. I believe he knew full well that I suspected the truth in regard to himself, but he took no notice then. Could I do anything for him in Edinburgh ? No, he said, but again thanked me, and very heartily wishing me a good journey, and speedy restoration to health, was fast sinking into a reverie over his glass of grog, when I aroused him again. I could take

great liberties with him, but this was the greatest I had ever taken, and presumptuous on my part it was, I freely confess—by laying my hand on his, and begging of him to put the fire-water away altogether. He only shook his head, and again I heard the ominous “Too late!” Yes, too late if you continue this, not so if you put it away from you like a man. He did not answer me further, not even when I repeated the question whether I could do anything for him in Scotland, save by a very melancholy shake of the head. No, no, he had nobody to send messages to in Scotland now, and so we parted for the time.

Ralph Erskine came up at night. Ralph had by this time fought his way on, till now he occupied a very good position in one of the first silk-mercers' in the

town, and was a specially trusted man. He would have liked much to accompany us; but his holiday was not for a fortnight yet, so he had come to bid us a cheerful good-bye; and we parted, with the promise on his part to call and see me as soon as he came down, and the hope, in which we all joined heartily, that it might be soon.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN I got home I found that the letter which Mr. Barton had given me contained only a few words, assuring me that my situation would be kept for me, and a ten-pound note, new and crisp from the bank, to defray my expenses. It was like our firm to do this, however much it might be unlike the way in which other great houses treated their servants. I would fain have returned instantly to thank them for their kindness, but that, I knew, would only have displeased them; but both my mother and myself gratefully acknowledged to Mr.

Barton that night our gratitude for their goodness. He had come to say good-bye, and that he would be very glad to hear from me; and then we were left to finish our preparations for the journey.

On a fine day in June my mother and I left Liverpool. She had come up in the greatest haste by the mail, a great part of the journey being by night. We determined now to return by the steamer. My mother, though bred and brought up in a seaport town, and come of a race of staunch seamen, was yet greatly afraid of the sea, and it was very much in consequence of the beautiful weather, so calm and sunny, that she consented to go in this way. Of course, the expense was an important consideration also. We could go in the cabin of the steamer for less than a half of the coach fare, and, to a person

just recovering as I was from a long illness, the confinement of the coach would have been intolerably irksome. We sailed about mid-day, and, seated on the deck, with a thick plaid about me, and my mother beside me, I greatly enjoyed the scene as the gallant steamer careered over the waves.

The coast about Liverpool is too flat and sandy to be at all interesting, but if the land is dull the water thereabout is not. I was greatly delighted by the fleets we saw going in and coming out under sail, by the ships harnessed to those powerful tug steamers which drew them hither and thither, irrespective of wind and tide, and by the numerous steamers either preceding or following us to every port in the Channel, rapidly threading their way. Then came the beacons and the light-vessels, and

afar off on the land the lighthouses on every line and point available for the various channels, all carefully watched and tended to guide those goodly vessels and their precious cargoes safe into harbour. The slight swell which heaved the bosom of the ocean did not annoy us. Because of it, the deep sound of a bell came booming over the surface of the water, making known another means in use to warn the mariner of his danger, and point out the proper course to steer for safety. Perhaps the immense machinery to be seen at the mouth of the Mersey having that one end in view—of guiding the seamen into harbour in safety—gives a better idea of the greatness of the port, and of the gigantic nature of the traffic there carried on, than anything else can do.

The long summer afternoon afforded us plenty of opportunity of seeing that true highway of nations, the Irish Channel; but the evening became cool, and my mother, fearful for me, insisted that I should go below; and there, much against my will, I was compelled to remain all the rest of that beautiful summer night, losing thereby the sight of the Isle of Man, at which we called. However, it was for my good, and so I quietly acquiesced.

When we got fairly into the Clyde I do not know. I suppose I was then fast asleep, for when I awoke we were far up the estuary. Having only seen these magnificent shores under the cold beams of the moon before, I enjoyed this part of the voyage very much. My mother was greatly delighted, but still had a kind of

hankering feeling that our own Firth was quite as fine, if not finer, though, to be sure, its beauties were of a very different kind. She had never been away from the shores of the Firth of Forth all her life; and they are fine enough, but their beauty is of a different type from that of these wild hills and deep withdrawing lochs.

We arrived in Glasgow in good time, though too late to catch the canal-boat, the conveyance we had calculated upon. But my mother was anxious to get home; so we took the coach, and after the delay of an hour in Glasgow, were once more bowling along merrily in a well-appointed coach, which made the journey in four hours; and if all went well we could be in time to get out to Errol that night. Of course the ten pounds, besides what of salary I had not spent,

made us much more independent than we otherwise should have been; and I saw my mother planned having me home that night regardless of expense.

Our journey through that pleasant country was a speedy one, and we were in Edinburgh in time for the Errol coach. With scarcely a moment's delay we were whirling along the well-known road, and soon rattling over the rough pavement of the honest old town. My mother ordered a chaise at the inn where the coach stopped, and while they were getting it ready we went up to Menie's place. We were both tired enough with this incessant travelling, and needed refreshment; but a little while longer, and we should be at home. Menie knew we were coming, but not exactly when we should arrive, and she was greatly sur-

prised when we made our appearance ; surprised, as I surmised, from more reasons than one.

Menie was a dressmaker and milliner, and had a shop, in which she sold various little articles, as I fancy I have mentioned before, behind which was a large workroom, where the girls sewed under her own supervision. Menie had prospered greatly, and was very highly spoken of in the town. I had not seen her for two years, and during that time she had matured into a very handsome woman. She was older than I, and always of a grave, sedate, quiet nature, so that at first I wondered all the more at the discomposure she manifested when my mother and I entered. But there was a tall, fine-looking young man standing at the counter trying on a pair of gloves,

as it appeared, and bending forward and speaking earnestly, and in a low voice, to her all the time; and he, too, became discomposed as soon as he caught sight of us. However, Menie, speedily recovering, hastened to welcome us home, and especially me, who had so lately been delivered from the jaws of death. While she was busy with my mother, the young fellow turned round to me, and having by this time succeeded in getting his refractory fingers into the gloves, he addressed me.

“How do you do, Andrew Ramsay?—I was very sorry to hear of your illness—I hope you have got quite better now?”

He held out his hand, which I took, somewhat passively. I had not the slightest idea who this could be—I did not

remember anyone like him whom I had formerly known; and yet he must be some old acquaintance, to address me as he had done. I suppose my looks expressed my surprise and bewilderment, for he laughed, and said,

“What! don’t you mind me, man?—don’t you remember me?—why, I could have told you among a thousand, sad as is the shake your illness has given you. Don’t you remember McDonald’s school up the pond?—don’t you mind the spree we had, and our stupid appearance before Sir John? Why, man, have you forgotten your old schoolfellow, Patrick——”

“Oh! I recollect now,” I cried; “I mind now—Patrick Chisholm.”

And I shook hands with him again, much more heartily than before. I noticed that when he spoke of the spree he looked

cautiously round, and spoke in a much lower tone than before, as if he did not wish that either my mother or Menie should hear.

"Are you going to be here long?" he asked, after awhile.

"Really, I can't tell," I answered; "till I get quite strong again, however—my employers would not permit me to go back to the office till then."

"Quite right, too; they must be good folk, though, from all I've heard," he said, blushing, as if he had committed himself; then he continued, more hurriedly, "I'll come up to see you in a day or two—I suppose you'll not forbid me, will you?"

"Of course not—I shall be very glad to see you as often as you care to come; it will be a very pleasant thing for me, Patrick, I can tell you."

"Thank you; I'll be off now. Good-bye, Miss Ramsay—I am glad to see your brother looking so well."

He shook hands with her, and I saw her lips moving, but could not catch the words she said; however, from his elated looks when he shook hands with me again, I inferred that it was something very pleasant and very interesting to him. Menie's cheek was flushed also, and there was an expression in her eyes which puzzled me greatly, as I did not recollect having ever noticed anything like it before. But while I could not help noting these things, I said nothing about them. Indeed, I was far too feeble and too much fatigued for anything like joking that night, and it was only in that way that I could have alluded to what I saw.

Menie got some tea for my mother and me, and then dismissed her pupils and her workers, and closed her shop, in order that she might go home with us. The chaise we had ordered at the inn came to the door, and before half an hour elapsed I was once more standing in our own old kitchen, once more at home, once more in that abode of peace and security, to which we all turned whenever we needed either rest or comfort, with the confident assurance that there, if anywhere, we should find it.

I was by far too much knocked up that night to be long out of bed. All through the journey, as indeed during all the time of my convalescence, I had steadily refused every kind of stimulant and intoxicant; and here at home, where whiskey —as in most Scottish houses at the time

—was prescribed for all the ills and trials of life, I had to endure the hardest test to which I could have been subjected. All of them insisted that I should take a glass of toddy—even my mother pressed me. It would do me good, and refresh me after the journey—it would make me sleep more soundly. Everyone of them had a different argument; but I did not give way, nor even falter in my resolution, which I told them all boldly. To be singular in this respect was very dreadful in their estimation, even hating and detesting drunkenness and excesses as they did; yet they could not bear to see me take such a decisive course—they said it was just a confession of having been a drunkard once, and that I was unable to guide myself, or to resist unless in that way. But they did not understand, they

could not perhaps be expected to understand, that one such glass might have awoke a demon within me, and so have periled both soul and body.

Menie was, as usual, to start early in the morning, but I had got up and slipped out, resolved to walk down with her to the foot of the lane. I wished to speak to her of various matters, and especially of Mary Leslie, whom I had expected to see the night before. I fancied that Menie was not very desirous of my company; still she did not refuse it, though she made a good deal of work about the risk I ran of hurting myself by going out so early. I went away with her; I could not go far, I feared my mother would be displeased; so I was just thinking of turning back, evidently to Menie's great relief, when, at the foot of the lane, where it joined the

high road, an unexpected—at least by me—apparition came in sight, Patrick Chisholm to wit. When he saw me along with Menie—had he been a little more cautious, he might easily have kept out of sight altogether—he had the manliness to come straight on, and congratulate me with much heartiness on being so well, and so early afoot. I could hardly answer him for laughing, while all the time Menie stood with eyes cast down, and a conscious blush flushing over all her face. I saw at once that I was one too many there, but I asked Patrick if he would go up with me to breakfast, which, with a very comical look, he excused himself from doing. Then bidding them a hasty good Morrow, I turned up the lane again. Menie had a secret, and here it was plainly laid before me.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONCE fairly settled at home, I progressed rapidly towards health and strength again. There was a vast difference between the pure free air of my own home in Lothian, and the close, confined atmosphere of even the most airy and healthy parts of Liverpool. Besides, my mind was more at ease than it had been for many a day; and though yet exposed to manifold temptations, and to the seductive influences of that spirituous liquid which had before plunged me into such an abyss of misery, I was each day becoming stronger, and more

able to resist the temptation. It was sometimes rather hard, indeed, to bear the importunities of those I loved, who placed all their glory in moderation, and disliked equally either extreme. Of course, when my old friends came to see me, they laughed at me and joked with me, and tried very hard to induce me to break my resolution, and all through kindness, too—not one of them but would have scorned the idea that I had need of keeping such strict watch and guard over myself. I was set down as crotchety and impracticable, after a time, and then I found the advantage of being firm and consistent from the first—I was left alone. But let no one think that this was not a hard trial. It was, indeed; it would hardly be so now, but then, when my principles were hardly formed, when the appetite was scarcely subdued, it was often

very distressing, and ever and anon something within me would suggest that I should yield, and give pleasure to my friends only for this once; that I need not do so again. I thank God from my inmost heart that I was able to resist, and from that time I date a peace of mind and health of body which I had not possessed for years before, and most likely never otherwise would.

There is an old proverb in Scotland, “Ilka man buckles his belt his ain gait!” I did so in the circumstances in which I stood, and left the others who had stronger brains, or greater power of will, to follow their own course.

After I had been a few days at home, and was growing somewhat stronger—I think it was on the Monday following our arrival —Patrick Chisholm came up to see me.

I daresay he had squired Menie up on the Saturday night, but I took care that none of the household should go further than the bottom of the lane to meet her. Susie—no longer little—and I went that length to meet her about the time she should come, and did not see him. I daresay he met her on the Monday morning, too, when she went away. Anyway he made his appearance very early in the day at our house, ostensibly to see me—really, I do believe, to get as far as he could into the good graces of us all; and, most certainly, he succeeded, especially with my mother, whose opinion was of by far the most importance, as he evidently knew full well. I was too weak as yet to go much about with him, but he neither seemed to care nor wish for that; we sat and chatted in the garden about anything of which we

could think—of the old times at school, and our prospects for the future.

Patrick Chisholm was the only son of a man of some wealth, one of the magnates of Errol, who was in large business as a Baltic merchant, and at the same time had a snug landed estate, which gave him the title of Chisholm of Balwearie, as well as merchant at Errol. Patrick had been bred a lawyer, and was just on the point of being admitted a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh. He was a fine-looking manly fellow, well informed, well principled, and possessing very considerable talent. At the same time to see him in our house, the feature of his character which you would say was the most conspicuous was his modesty. Not that he was at all bashful, or ever hesitated to express his opinion on any subject, but he was willing

to defer to the opinions, or even the prejudices, of others, without giving up his own ; and there was none of that dogmatism which even then I had found to be a common fault in young men, especially in those who had had anything like a better training than the people with whom they argued or conversed. My mother was delighted with him, as was my father also. I was looking at him from a different point of view from theirs, and watched him closely, and not without a great deal of anxiety. He had said nothing to me about Menie, though I fancied frequently he was on the very point of speaking about her. Why I was anxious is easily told.

It is quite true, so far as descent went, Patrick was of no better family than our own ; but his was a rich one, and of course

I thought it was only natural to infer that it was a worldly one. Menie—though she was only the principal dressmaker in Errol—was, in my opinion, a fit mate for any gentleman in the land. But would Patrick's father and sisters—his mother had been dead for many years—think so ; would they be ready to welcome the dressmaker, the poor man's child, into the family as the future mistress? It is true, my father had ever held the position of a gentleman, and when he went to Errol, which was very rarely indeed, he associated with the best in the town, though he was only a poor man, as was quite well known. His salary was but a small one, and though we always had lived in comfort, and no one coming to the house, or seeing us in the town, could ever say that there was anything like poverty about us, neither was

there anything which showed the reverse. Therefore I was anxious about Menie, and about Patrick as well. I had no fear for the principles or the integrity of Chisholm, but of what his family would say, and how they would act, I was in great doubt. Should Menie and Patrick have pledged their troth to one another, which I feared must be the case, it seemed to me that we were drifting into a stormy sea, and I would have given anything at that moment had either of them thought fit to make me their confidant.

And I was very anxious from a more personal cause. During those past two years I had only heard of Mary Leslie now and then at second hand, through Menie or Miss Grahame. Whenever I wrote to Menie, I used to send my kindest remembrances to Mary, and she

had often done the like in return, but we had had no direct communication. I was very anxious about Mary, therefore, and yet did not like to make other than formal inquiries about her. I knew that she had become Menie's partner, having been disgusted with teaching in a Highland family, and the entire seclusion to which it condemned her in one of the lonely Hebridean Isles. I believe she was very kindly treated, but she could not stand the place, and the difficulties of teaching English to those whose native tongue was Gaelic. She had gone from home some days before I came back, and I had neither seen nor heard anything further about her, than that she was quite well, even for many days after she returned.

Had my liking for Mary been only a

boyish fancy, I might have been much annoyed, but still could have sung—

“If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be!”

But my affection was something deeper and more lasting than a mere boyish fancy, and I could not help feeling very anxious about Mary.

For the first ten days I was not able to walk as far as Errol ; and, indeed, if I had fancied I was, my mother would not have permitted me, so I had perforce to wait as patiently as I could. But on the second Saturday night I was in some sort rewarded for my patience ; for going down with my invariable companion, Susie—who was as proud now to give her big brother her arm as ever she had been to take his hand in the old times, to wander about the fields, or to go to school—we met Mary

Leslie and Menie, escorted, as I guessed would be the case, by young Chisholm; but there was another young man with them too, and I became almost frantically jealous for the moment. I did not pause to consider what might be the reason, or whether there was a reason for the presence of that lad, but I would have given something for an excuse for thrashing him soundly; I believe I could have done it, weak as I was, so thoroughly was I enraged. But Mary herself at once disarmed me, for, without bidding the lad good-bye, she ran forward as soon as she saw me, and grasped my wasted hand in both of hers, and looked compassionately in my face, with, at the same time, an eager, questioning look, while her beautiful eyes filled with tears as she remarked the wan face, on which the colour was only faintly

beginning to return, and the emaciated, enfeebled frame.

“Poor Steenie!” she said at last, wiping the tears from her eyes—“I knew well that you had been very ill, but I did not expect to see you so dreadfully shaken as this.”

“Yes, Mary,” I said, “I have been as near death as one could be, and yet live; I have been on the very verge of the valley of the shadow of death, and yet have escaped. Thanks be to God, I am greatly better now.”

Mary would not take my arm, but she insisted on giving me hers. It came to much the same thing, however, and then we turned to bid the young men good-bye. Chisholm invited himself up for the next day, and I bade him be sure to be in time for dinner; and so, with a hearty good

night to him, and a distant, and, as I fancied, ceremonious bow to the other lad, we separated—they to return down the pleasant road, laughing, singing, and rejoicing—as well became their happy, untroubled, youthful spirits—in the sweet, calm summer gloaming, towards the town, and we, more gravely and sedately under the shadow of the great trees, where it was already quite as dark as that summer night would be, towards home.

Mary Leslie and I fell a little into the rear of the other two, but we did not say much to each other. She had almost all the conversation to herself, and in it she chiefly expressed her sympathy with me in my late illness, and her gladness that I was so far restored. It would seem, from what she said, and from the way in which she was affected, that they had had no notion that

I had been so dangerously ill. My mother had only been able to send them the merest scraps of information while I was hovering between life and death, and when the change for the better took place she had not thought it proper to tell how very near the final end of all it had been with me. I daresay Menie would have been as much shocked, only when I first saw her Patrick Chisholm was speaking to her, and she had been thrown quite into a flutter of confusion at being caught, as it were. But Mary's eyes were not obscured in the same way, perhaps, I was vain enough to think ; they were obscured to every other person, and only fairly open to me. True it is, however, that when I told her of the dark dismal valley through which I had been so mercifully guided, and of my thoughts and feelings as I emerged again into conscious

life, her tears fell fast, and I felt her hand laid on mine, a gesture so full of sympathy—perhaps of something more than mere sympathy—that it went to my heart.

That feeling of sadness, by no means unpleasing in itself, wore off, however, as we reached home, and in the cozy brightness of my mother's parlour we, in the buoyant sanguineness of our hearts, forgot past trouble, and looked forward with hopefulness to the future. I told my mother that we should have a visitor tomorrow; and when, in answer to her question, I mentioned who it was, Menie's face flushed all over with a violent blush, and, rising hastily, she left the room, while Mary prepared more leisurely to follow her, looking to me somewhat consciously and smiling. But my mother looked grave and disturbed when I told her where

I had seen Patrick Chisholm, and with whom. Not that she distrusted Menie, but I daresay she thought that this might be the beginning of the dear lassie's sorrows.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

